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The Blitz is on!

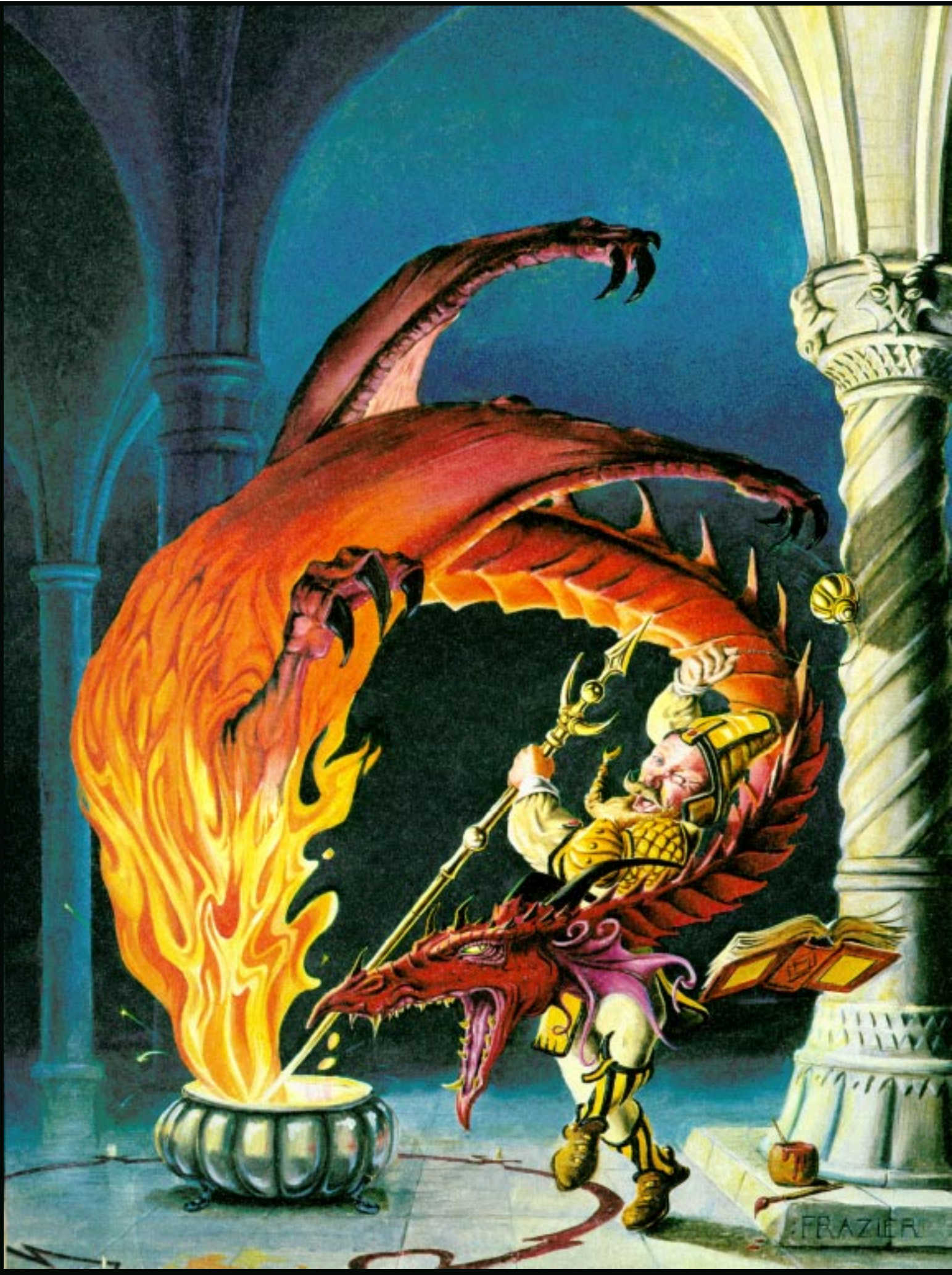


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The 1996 tour has begun. Look for TSR at these conventions, and watch for updates as Dragon Blitz '96 gets underway!

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FRAZIER

The Wyrms' Turn

Blessed are the Geek

I think it all started on December 8, 1980. While Mark David Chapman fired four bullets into John Lennon in the entrance way to the Dakota Apartments, I was being fitted for my first pair of glasses. That night I had the first of what became a recurring nightmare. *I'm in the cafeteria waiting in the lunch line. It's 11:30 A.M. on a Tuesday. I know this because I look at the clock that hangs above the sign that reads, "Today's Special - Sloppy Joes." I'm wearing knit pants with a matching brown vest and a turtleneck. The older, okay-looking football player standing behind me says, "Guys don't make passes at girls who wear glasses." Without turning to look at him, I take my lunch tray from the heavy-set woman with purple hair and sit down by myself. Then the name calling starts, "Hey four eyes! Metal mouth! Did your mommy dress you this morning?" I open my mouth to say something but only end up spitting out partially chewed sloppy joe. Suddenly I can't breathe, and my jaw feels wired shut. The cafeteria erupts in laughter. I wake up gasping and coughing. That was when it began. That was when I realized I was a nerd.*

When I reached high school, I tried to hide my true nerd self. I played varsity soccer and tennis. I was a member of the student government. I wore preppy clothes and even, *gasp*, permed my hair. My braces came off, and my parents finally let me get contacts. I fit in so well that the anti-social club didn't ask me to be a member. But that lasted only a year — and then I met some people who were just like me — and we were tired of hiding. I cut my hair, I wore pieces of brown packaging tape on my jeans, and my friends and I printed T-shirts that read "Misfits of Society." We wore them with pride.

In college, my friends and I organized all-day gaming sessions of the AD&D® game or Chaosium's Call Of Cthulhu. During summer break we drove to Teri Andre State Park and played war games in the

sand dunes, complete with water balloons as our weapons. We watched *Star Trek: The Next Generation* religiously. The comic book shop became a hangout, and we openly admitted to liking the film version of *Dune*. We were not afraid.

I need no longer be uneasy with my geekdom; the geek is now a pop culture icon. About a month ago, the local paper even ran an article about the fashionability of geeks. It's "cool" to look "uncool," and we're scoring big all over the place. If you don't believe me, just look around you. Cable television now has a channel devoted to nothing but science fiction. You can watch four variations of the *Star Trek* series. *The X-Files* is one of the most popular shows in the country. *Forrest Gump* was one of the highest grossing films of 1994. Nerdy pocket protectors have evolved into fanny packs. Wearing glasses is trendy. The ultimate geek anthem, Gary Numan's "Cars," has matured into "He Thought of Cars" by Blur. And last August, 30,000 of us descended upon Milwaukee for four days of fun, fantasy, and science fiction.

I now have a different recurring dream. *I'm walking down an aisle in a crowded auditorium wearing hush puppies, brown corduroy trousers, and an argyle sweater. I work my way up to the stage and stand in front of the podium. I lean in toward the microphone before me and I say "Hi, my name is Michelle, and I'm a geek." The crowd stands and applauds.*

Michelle Vuckovich

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Publisher
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Associate Publisher
Brian Thomsen

Editor-in-Chief
Pierce Watters

Editor
Anthony J. Bryant

Art director
Larry W. Smith

Editor
Dave Gross

Associate editor
Michelle Vuckovich

Subscriptions
Janet L. Winters

U.S. advertising
Cindy Rick

U.K. correspondent/advertising
Carolyn Wildman

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May 1996
Volume XX, No. 12
Issue #229

Magic Miscibility

James Collier

*So you've got all this magic.
What can go wrong?*

Page 8

The Rhabdomancer

Steve Berman

*It's finders keepers for mages who
specialize in divining and dousing.*

Page 12

Illusions of Grandeur

Rogers Cadenhead

*Hear Emil Duli Wonk tell you what you
really need to know for your PC illusionists.*

Page 20

Curses

Ed Rice

When you want to do your very worst. . .

Page 28

A Wizards' Three

Chris Perry

*Three new mages: frost wizards, fiend
slayers, and spiritualists.*

Page 40

The Dimensional Wizard

Barry A.A. Dillinger

*A new kit for wizards specializing in
dimensions and planar travel.*

Page 50

Survival of the Smartest

Lloyd Brown III

Heed your instructor and keep those 1st-level mages alive.

Page 66

Departments

Bazaar of the Bizarre: The Magic of India

Michael Selinker

Magical items from the India of song and legend.

Page 33

Rogue's Gallery: Tylk

Skip Williams

Meet Til-Kyrmeldur ap Puirdoch, Tylk to his friends. This half-elven druid/ranger believes in the goodness of all.

Page 47

Campaign Classics: The Wu Jen

Dave "Zeb" Cook

The powerful mage from the Oriental Adventures gets a facelift for 2nd Edition.

Page 54

Dungeon Mastery: "A" is for NPC

Keith Strohm

Tips on making a Grade-A NPC

Page 85

Magic Doesn't Always Go "Boom"

Christopher Byler

Not all magic has to be flashy.

Page 72

Columns

3 The Wyrms' Turn

Geeks of the world, unite. We have nothing to lose but our pocket protectors.

6 D-Mail

Reader's letters on our new look, Krynn, and Toril.

61 Role of Books

John C. Bunnell reads the newest novels.

89 Sage advice

Skip Williams answers questions on spell working and some optional rules.

93 Cons & Pros

We let you know where the conventions are and who's going to be there.

95 RPGA® Network News

Network coordinator Scott Douglas presents a few of his 297 Rules of Convention Attendance.

97 Forum

Letters this month contain advice for DMs and players, as well as a discussion on women in gaming.

108 Role-playing Reviews

Rick Swan takes a virtual vacation.

120 The Current Clack

Allen Varney talks about the industry.

Other Material

99 Knights of the Dinner Table

100 DragonMirth

102 Gamer's Guide

104 Floyd

117 TSR Previews

FICTION

76 The Taking of Mount Nevermind

(DragonLance®: Tales of the Fifth Age)

David Wise

Pyrothraxus the Great, a mighty red dragon, claims his new home. There's just one tiny problem.





More on the new look

Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine:

I haven't opened a current issue of *DRAGON Magazine* for the last three years, since I let my subscription run out. For some reason, the articles ceased to be relevant to me and my campaigns. I noticed the January (#225) and February (#226) issues on a bookstore rack and the new format captured my curiosity. I purchased both issues and promptly began perusing the articles.

I must commend you for your efforts in revamping the magazine — they have really paid off.

The format and layout of the magazine are much friendlier and — more importantly — the articles are better. There is a definite sense of purpose and direction in the articles and in the themes of both issues, two qualities I felt were lacking three years ago. There were an unprecedented six articles between the two issues that were well-presented and actually useful, well above the traditional one article per issue that I am used to. If you continue turning out magazines as worthwhile as issues #225 and #226, you will win back an old subscriber. I hope that you are successful.

For your information, the articles that I found noteworthy were "Secret Origins and Motivations of Player Characters," "I'm Okay, You're One-Dimensional," "Dungeon Mastery: What to Do When Your Party Wants to Split Up," "The

Magic Goes Away," "Off-the-Cuff NPCs," and "Improve with Improv."

David L. Kinney
Chicago, IL

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*:

I have not read *DRAGON Magazine* with any regularity since 1989. I picked up issue #225 (January) with a little hesitation, but I heard the magazine was regrouping, and I thought I would give it a try. I was not disappointed.

The reason I hadn't bought a *DRAGON Magazine* in so long is that it had nothing to offer me as a DM or a player. In issue #225, however, I will be able to use almost every article in some way (except for the **PLAYER'S OPTION™** rules).

I have, however, one strong criticism. I do not like polybagged magazines. Considering *DRAGON Magazine* has not been useful to me for seven years, I questioned buying #225. I don't like buying products sight unseen. Although I am filled with hope for *DRAGON Magazine's* future, I will pay \$4.95 for a polybagged magazine only to find it is of no use to me once or twice before I stop buying it altogether.

Ed May

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*:

As a player of **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** for over 15 years, I had to write and comment on your recent changes. "Rogue's Gallery" goes back to your old "Giants in the Earth" series. You change, but still keep basics the same. I was also pleased to see "Campaign Classics." I am — and will always be — a **GREYHAWK®** player. I also fell in love with the combined SF/Fantasy aspect of spelljamming. For all of us long-playing, hard-core adventurers who grew up in the alley-ways of Greyhawk City and one day made it to the stars on an elven man-o-war, I thank you.

Larry W. Cofferen
Abilene, TX

Thanks for the kind words, guys. Your checks are in the mail. It's really satisfying to know that people appreciate the final prod-

uct. We're hoping to continue to make it even better in the coming months.

Soth is back on Krynn?

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*:

In the novel *Dragons of Summer Flame*, Lord Soth makes an appearance. In the novel *Knight of the Black Rose*, Lord Soth is supposedly drawn into the land of Ravenloft. How could he be in both? I'm asking because I run a **RAVENLOFT®** campaign and my brother runs a **DRAGONLANCE®** campaign, and we can't figure out which one Soth belongs to.

Oh... in the short story "Kindling" (issue #225), who was the red dragon, and where does she come from?

David Alden
Palmdale, CA

Reread Dragons carefully. Lord Soth himself is not seen on Krynn. He is rumored to be there, reported to be leading his legion of undead knights. Don't trust rumors. Soth is the dark lord of Sithicus, and dark lords can't leave their realms. So unless you have some phenomenal planar shift that alters all sorts of realities (which, granted, the Chaos god may have created), Soth is stuck in Demiplane of Dread for the present time. Your brother's out of luck.

The red dragon in Jean Rabe's story was Malystrix, Malys to her friends. As to exactly who she is, where she comes from, and what her arrival means to Ansalon. . . you'll have to wait and see.

The good, the bad, and the ugly

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*:

Congratulations on the revamp; it's definitely a smoother and slicker package. The polybag is no doubt a benefit for subscribers and allows the occasional freebie, so no objections here. On the other hand, the new logo resembles some sort of grotesque blob falling from the sky. Oh, good call on reproducing the cover art sans copy!

As for the interior, I'm pleased with

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Submissions: All material published in *DRAGON Magazine* becomes the exclusive property of the publisher, unless special arrangements to the contrary are made prior to publication. *DRAGON Magazine* welcomes unso-

the attention to discontinued worlds (a necessity, since no new releases support these treasured campaigns), but so far all we've seen is spellbooks (enough already!) and spells. Let's see new backgrounds, encounters, and even some monsters.

A true "return to *DRAGON Magazine's* roots" should include lots of alternate classes for PCs and NPCs, adventuring locales from commonplace to exotic, and background material.

Industry news and RPGA® Network News are fine, informative additions.

I have one more minor complaint. Sometimes it seems every article has to begin with a cute scenario or planar traveling informant. It is high time for the editor to wield his power and declare these seemingly ceaseless introductions to be welcome no longer.

Mark Wade
Salt Lake City, UT

Thanks, Mark. Your comments are noted, although you may want to look at "Campaign Classics" again. So far we've had spellbooks (January), magical sands (February), and a revisited wizard kit (May). That's hardly all spellbooks and spells. Future installments of "Campaign Classics" will feature all you have suggested and more. Keep reading.

What about the rest of Faerûn?

Dear DRAGON Magazine:

I recently acquired *Wizards and Rogues of the Realms* and *Warriors and Priests of the Realms*. I am, as always, pleased by the quality. I added them to my ever-growing collection of FORGOTTEN REALMS® material. I am starting to grow disappointed, however, in the one-sided view of the materials that are being pro-

duced. I have all published material available for the Realms, including *Maztica*, *The Horde*, and *Kara-Tur*. I find these as interesting (if not more so) as western Faerûn. I think it is safe to say that almost 90% of the materials detail this one region. Are there any projects in the works to include these fascinating areas? The two aforementioned purchases would have been true treasures if they had included even a token section for those three areas.

Thanks for the outstanding products that TSR consistently puts out, but please in the future try to remember the adventurers who would like to explore the other 75% of Faerûn.

Michael Brock
Niantic, CT

I agree with you 100%. I would like to see more submissions for the magazine on other aspects of the Realms, as well. Writers?

Correction

The telephone number to find a TSR dealer near you which was printed in issue #227 is incorrect. The actual number is 1-800-384-4TSR, or 1-800-384-4877.

How to contact us

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On the Cover

Over the past couple of years, cover artist Dan Frazier has been quick to let me know that he's not happy with me when I refer to him as a "dwarf artist." This is not to say that Dan is very short (although he'll never play pro basketball), but rather that I'm particularly fond of his renderings of them. He hasn't done anything here to change my perception.

Dan has the ability to get more personality into his dwarves than just about anyone I know, and, as long as he keeps sending them to me, I'll probably keep publishing them.

Dan has been keeping himself busy painting for the collectible card market and is currently working on several for the SPELLFIRE™ card game.

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Magic Miscibility

by James R. Collier

illustrated by David Horne

Mixing magical items can be bad for your health. . .

Back in the original AD&D® game, a rule stated, “Only two magical rings can be worn at any one time.” This rule was designed to preserve game balance. Although only rings were mentioned in the rule, this rule may have been a precedent. The game has always had a lot of magical rings, and back when that rule was made, the list of other magical items was much shorter. Today, there are four volumes of amulets, bracers, cloaks, diadems, eyes, footwear, and girdles all of which can apparently be worn and used at the same time.

Interestingly, the rule limiting usage of rings was accompanied by a second rule, this time for potions, concerning miscibility. This rule stated that if you activated the magic of two potions at once, bad things might occur. This, too, set a precedent. We now had two rules aimed specifically at preventing player characters from activating several magical items at once. All that is left is the final step.

If we expand these rules to cover all magical items, we can take a step toward ending the Monty Haul campaign, not to mention restoring the game to a contest of wits, instead of a “which item should I use now?” competition.

DMs, please note that these tables were meant for two purposes. On one hand, they penalize PCs who collect and try to use too much magic, but they do it in such a way as to provide some humor and role-playing possibilities. Do not use them as player-killers, having a PC grab a dead fish when a vampire strikes. Don’t use them as rewards, either, or ways to get rid of cursed items. Even the most benign effect should have drawbacks.

Miscibility rules

The rules are fairly simple. Here are two tables, used whenever a PC “activates” more than two magical effects. This can be done by wearing

a ring, amulet, girdle, or other device (as opposed to merely carrying in a pouch or backpack); drinking a potion; rubbing on an oil, perfume, salve, or ointment; or activating a rod, staff or wand.

Whenever a player character has more than two constant items active at once (that is, devices that do not have a specified duration), the player (or DM) must roll a d100 on Table 1: Continuous Conditions. Thereafter, every time a new item is put on or activated, the previously rolled condition is discarded and a new one is determined.

Whenever the PC is already acting under two or more magical effects and commands a charged item to function, drinks a potion, or employs a one-shot magical device for a further magical effect, a roll is made on Table 2: Temporary Conditions. The conditions from this table last only as long as the duration of the potion, dust, etc., and can be dispelled, although with a 50% chance of dispelling the magic of the potion, dust, or whatever as well.

There are several important modifiers and exceptions that must be noted.

For every active item over three, a cumulative -5% penalty is imposed. (This modifier does not apply to rolls on Table 2.)

Items that do not affect the owner, such as a *wand of fire* or a *necklace of missiles*, do not require rolls. Spells cast upon someone wearing multiple magical items do not require a roll to be made unless these spells cause some permanent enchantment. (It is up to the DM to determine what he considers appropriate.) If so, roll on Table 2, and if the roll indicates non-function, the enchantment is *dispelled* before it can even take effect.

Priestly items such as *phylacteries of faithfulness* do not count toward rolls, but they should function only with other priestly items dedicated to the same faith. In addition, priestly items should function only with aligned weapons and devices that match



their own alignments exactly. A *mace of disruption* owned by a PC who picks up a lawful good *sword +1* becomes merely an enchanted mace, magical but imparting no bonuses to attacks or damage, (a *mace +0*) until the sword is discarded, while the sword will also seem to be non-magical in combat. (It is up to the DM to decide if the sword and mace are still at least “magical” for purposes of striking special creatures.) For these charts, healing potions, salves, and healing devices other than *rings of regeneration* are considered priestly items.

Field effect items, such as a *ring of protection* (which gives a +1 save bonus to everyone within 5'), cause everyone within that area with two active magical items to roll on Table 2. This condition cannot be *dispelled*, but it ends when the PC becomes clear (or steps out) of the area of effect. Another roll must be made every time a PC moves back into the field.

Items that perform the same function impose a further -10% penalty per item. For instance, *bracers of defense*, magical armor, and a *cloak of protection* all have the effect of enhancing one's Armor Class, so a fighter wearing the first two and then donning the latter must roll on Table 3, with a -20% roll. If the fighter were wearing a *ring of regeneration* and magical armor, however — items conferring benefits in two different areas — and then put on the *cloak*, the roll would be only at -10%.

An example: A PC wears a *cloak of protection*, *bracers of defense*, an *amulet of the planes*, a *scarab of holy turning*, and a *girdle of giant strength*. On his left hand is a *ring of protection*, and on his right is a *ring of jumping*. He has a *wand of wonder*, a *potion of extra healing*, and a *crystal ball* in his backpack, and is trying on a pair of *boots of dancing*. (His DM loves him.) Because he is wearing and using more than three items, there is a -5% penalty for each of them. Note that three magical items he wears are there to enhance his Armor Class. They receive the secondary penalty for being multiple items performing the same function.

The cumulative penalty on the roll is -65%, broken down thusly: -5% each for an excessive quantity of active items (total: -35%); -10% for the second AC-enhancing magical item; and -20% for the third AC-enhancing item.

The *wand of wonder* and the *crystal ball*, as they are in the backpack, do not effect the wearer and are not counted.

The *potion* is dormant until drunk, and the *scarab* is a priestly item; they don't effect the roll, either. Since the PC is trying on the *boots*, he rolls on Table 1. Further rolls must be made whenever the *wand* or *crystal ball* is used or the *potion* consumed; but these rolls are made on Table 2.

If resulting conditions are contradictory, the temporary condition takes precedence. (If the DM wishes, he may call for a re-roll.) Once the temporary condition has run its course, the continuous condition resumes. Only adding or removing a device changes that permanent condition, though the DM may consider *remove curse* or *wish* spells to return the PC to his *status quo ante*.

Table 1: Continuous Conditions (roll 1d100)

- 1-19. All magical items carried or worn, including cursed items, cancel each other out. An item must be added or removed before any work at all.
20. One item glows as though a *continual light* spell has been cast on it. The item need not be one of the PC's magical items. Decide randomly, or DM's choice.
21. The next time the wearer is hit by a *magic missile*, a volley of *magic missiles* explodes from his body, hitting everyone within 10' for 4d6 hp damage.
22. All magical items adhere to the wearer. Only adding an item ends this condition.
23. Dogs howl when within 50' of this character.
24. Drinking any liquid — even water — causes the wearer to become intoxicated for 1d4 rounds.
25. Mice appear and tug at magical amulets, rings, or similar items whenever the PC sleeps. Roll 1d6 for each turn of sleep. On a 1, the tugging awakens the PC, and he suffers a +2 penalty on initiative the next day due to lack of sleep. The mice never succeed in removing anything.
26. A strange, melodious humming emanates from the PC's person (think of the monolith in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*).
27. Any and all foodstuffs carried by the PC become crystallized salt.
28. The PC begins to itch unbearably if he has to ride any animal. Dexterity is reduced to 3, spellcasting is impossible, and he makes quite a spectacle of himself.
29. The PC smells like bacon.

30. The PC sees all opponents as giant rats. (“What do you mean the giant rat energy drains me?”) He can attempt to disbelieve at -4.
31. An illusory member of the opposite sex (ideally an old flame from a messy split) follows the PC constantly, periodically shouting “yoo-hoo!” and waving. No one else can see the illusion.
32. The PC's voice becomes squeaky. Reaction rolls have a penalty of -5.
33. The PC sweats profusely. His effects begin to rust. Every 5 rounds he must drink a cup of water or temporarily lose 1 point of Constitution. If his Constitution reaches zero, he dies.
34. Any music affects the PC like *Otto's irresistible dance* spell.
37. The PC has an irresistible urge to put on yet another magical item. If there are no more in his possession, he must save vs. spell or become belligerent with his comrades, demanding they give him something else. If he saves, he continues to be uncomfortable and bellicose and makes a grab at the first enchanted item he sees.
38. Any magical items possessing the power of speech whisper the name of the PC in awed tones when they are within a 20' radius of him.
39. The PC cannot understand any written language he otherwise knows; any scroll or spellbook he attempts to read looks like scribbling to him.
40. Whenever the PC comes to a fork or other form of divergent path, an unearthly voice whispers to him which way he should go. (It is at random, however, and has nothing to do with his destiny, safety, goals, or desires — although he may well think it does.)
41. The PC's food and water supply never runs out; they mystically replenish themselves.
42. A ghostly head floats above the PC, frowning down on him.
43. Moss grows on the PC's clothing and armor. It can be removed, but it grows back in one day.
44. One charged item (*ring*, *wand*, *staff*, etc.) that the PC carries “goes off” when jostled. DM decides when the jostling occurs.
45. Speaking more than three words at a time gives the PC hiccoughs for 1d10 turns. Spellcasting is impossible, missile attacks are made at -4, regular attacks at -2.
46. If a spellcaster, the PCs spells all

function at maximum capacity (range, duration, damage, etc.).

47. The PC's reflection, in a pool or a mirror, is of the PC at age 100 (or the demi-human equivalent).
48. Protective magics are reversed (e.g., a *ring of protection* +2 becomes -2).
49. The PC projects an aura of invincibility such that villagers wherever he goes beg him to deal with the local pack of werewolves, vampires, family of frost giants, evil tax officials, etc. Unfortunately, things hostile to the PC do not detect this aura.
- 50-59. The newest item functions, but the other items become inert.
- 60-100. No effect; everything functions normally.

Table 2: Temporary or Instantaneous Conditions (roll 1d20)

- 1-3. All items carried, including cursed ones, are nullified.
4. All spells and magical devices within 15' of the PC become inert for one turn.
5. A random monster appears, shouts "Give me my ---!" and attacks, trying to gain possession of some item

(DM's choice) of the PC's until the condition ends. If the PC should give the monster the item, it disappears, only to reappear during the PC's next melee. There is a 60% chance it fights for the PC; otherwise it joins the fight against the PC's party.

6. The PC's charged items are energized so that the next one used expends half its total charges in one massive *discharge* (e.g., a *wand of magic missiles* with 20 charges would launch 10 *missiles*). The rest of the charges or charged items function normally after that.
7. Charged items function, but, due to magical forces in flux, they fail to expend their charges while this condition lasts — effectively giving the PC "free" uses of the item.
8. The next time the PC successfully hits in a melee, a loud disembodied chorus sounds, "Ta-daaaah!"
9. All one-shot items (potions, dusts, etc.) are permanently spoiled, their magic dispelled.
10. The PC appears to be 100 years old (or the demi-human equivalent) to everyone but himself.
11. The PC begins to itch all over.

Dexterity is reduced by 3 points until this condition ends.

12. All charged items gain 1d6 charges. Items whose maximum number of charges is exceeded explode, causing 10d6 hp damage to all within 10'.
13. Whenever the PC reaches into a container, trunk, pouch, pocket, or hole for something, all he withdraws is a dead fish. Containers must be emptied upon the ground for him to be able to get their contents.
14. A 5-year-old child appears and hugs the PC about the waist, sighing "My hero!" It is an illusion that vanishes after 1 round.
15. The newest item activated or otherwise brought into use functions, while the others become inert.
- 16-20. No effect; everything functions normally.



James R. Collier lives in Ontario, Canada. This is his first appearance in DRAGON® Magazine.

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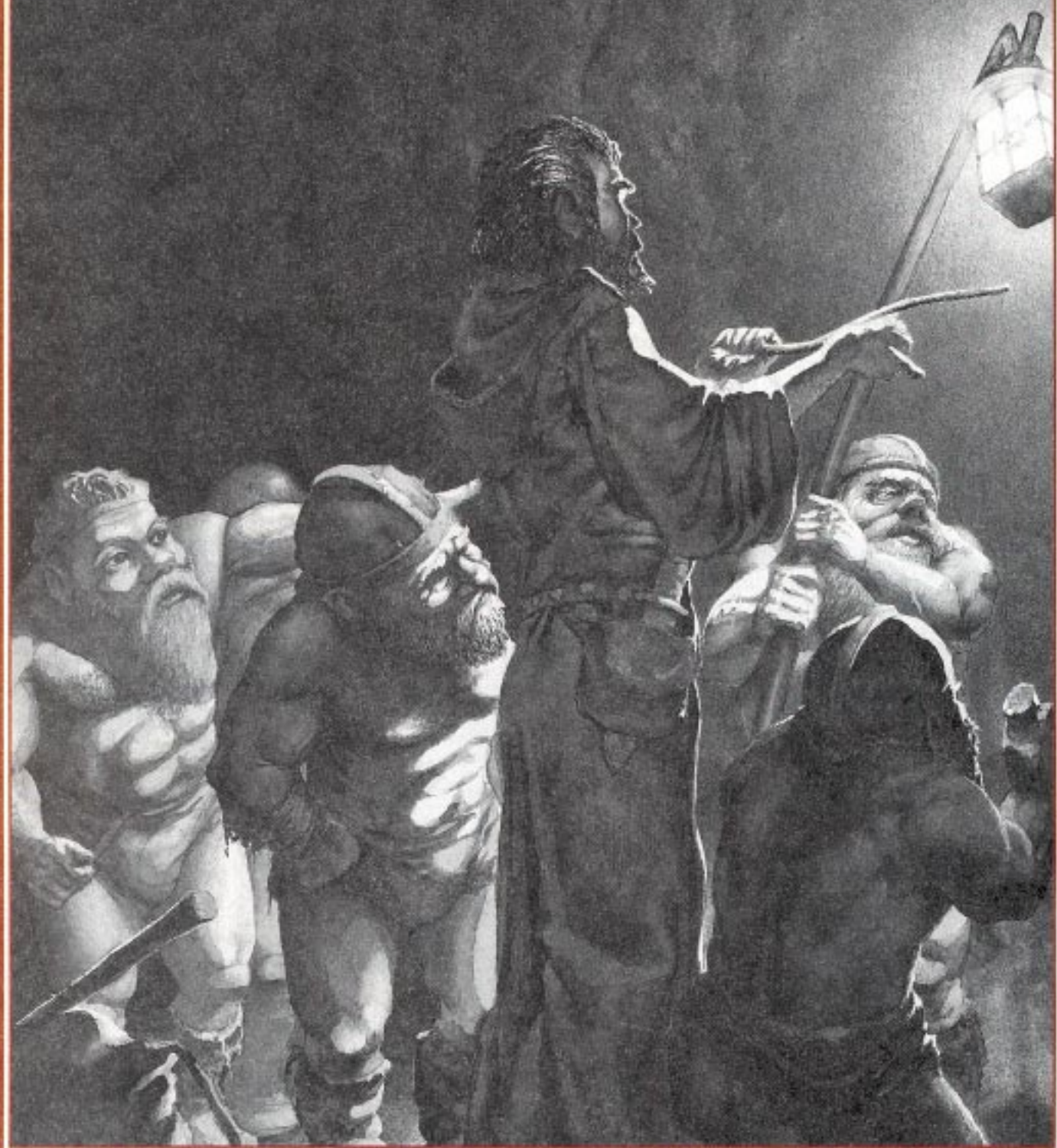
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A new branch for the divination school



by Steve Berman

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

The Rhabdomancers

Divination, as the ancients knew it, came in many forms. Some would inhale incense and reveal what it inspired.

Others used augury, the examination of birds' entrails, to predict the future. And then there are those who carried a big stick; practitioners of rhabdomancy.

In 16th century Germany, the study of rhabdomancy (divination by means of a rod or dowsing stick) became popular. Rather than just being a local custom, dowsing was practiced on a very large scale and enjoyed great popularity in the villages around the countryside. With time, the skill was ingeniously applied to prospecting at mines and mountainsides, with the magicians searching for beds of coal or exploring the soil for fresh water springs.

The usual dowsing rod is a forked stick, commonly hazel wood, held in both hands with the angle of the fork foremost. The rhabdomancer walks over the ground, and, supposedly, the rod twists as soon as it passes over the desired mineral or water. That the divining rod was so freely employed in Germany during this period can be seen in the many woodcuts of mining operations that showed its practice.

The role of rhabdomancy was expanded by the French in the 17th century. The divining rod became the latest novelty and was used not only to discover water, mines, and hidden treasure, but also to trace robbers and murderers.

With such a history, rhabdomancy is the perfect addition to the AD&D® fantasy realm. At first glance such a character seems limited. True, not too many adventures take place around mine-shafts. But then, it is logical to assume that the lure of the Underdark would quickly command the attention of mages well suited and experienced to working underground.

The rhabdomancer

Description: A rhabdomancer (or "rhabdomere") is a wizard learned in the use of a dowsing rod, a seemingly ordinary wooden stick with which he can hone divinatory magic. Most rhabdomancers come from rural backgrounds, as urban wizards scoff at the practice. In such areas, guilds of rhabdomancers exist, but they are small and represent the trade as prospectors, the members eager to be hired to find valuable sources of water and precious metals and minerals. Some of these magicians eventually seek out new applications for their craft, exploring underground for

their own ends. They might even adopt the role of guides to the caverns. Such a mage can be of any alignment.

Though most rhabdomancers are human, certainly there is room for other races to learn the trade. Because of the tie with mining and underground exploration, a DM may well consider that some exceptional dwarves or Stoutish halflings would adopt a career as rhabdomancers. Whether such mages can be chosen as player characters must be decided.

Role: Most rural communities will welcome a rhabdomancer for his abilities, which seem wondrous to common folk. Using his divination powers, he can solve the mystery of stolen jewels, find a child lost in the woods, or discover a new site for a thirsty village's new well. Even in the Underdark, the native races know something of a rhabdomancer's ability to find new caves and lost treasure.

Weapon proficiencies: *Required:* None. *Recommended:* dagger, dart, small pick (much like a smaller version of the mining tool, it inflicts 2-5/1-4 hp damage).

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Required:* dowsing (new), prospecting (new). *Recommended:* direction sense, endurance, engineering, mining, reading/writing, stonemasonry.

Spells: As specialists in the school of Greater Divination, rhabdomancers cannot use spells from the school of Conjuration/Summoning. However, the guilds offer to teach several unique spells to rhabdomancers, including spells that deal with tapping magical energies through the dowsing rod.

Special benefits: 1) All rhabdomancers begin the game with an additional language, which must belong to a mining race (dwarven is the most common, though some learn deep gnome, and those of an evil bent may even study kobold). 2) A rhabdomancer substitutes his divining rod for the material component in divination spells (except the revised *locate object* found below). Also, when using the divining rod, the mage may receive an increase in effectiveness in certain divination spells (see below). Starting at first level, a rhabdomancer receives a +1 bonus on all saves vs. rods, staves, or wands. This benefit increases by an additional +1 for every five levels of ability gained.

Special hindrances: As these mages practice the art of Divination only through the use of rhabdomancy, any attempt by them to cast a Divination spell without a divining rod results in a penalty of double the normal casting time and a 10% unmodified chance of failure. Also, a rhabdomancer can never cast a reversed



Divinatory spell that would obscure or hinder detection, as such practices are beyond his understanding. Related to this, spells of illusion are rarely practiced, so the chance to learn any such spell is halved.

Dowsing: The character has been trained in the use of a divining rod. While all rhabdomancers begin with the spell to craft an effective rod, this proficiency covers the insight necessary to interpret the finer meanings of the woods tugging and twitching. Apprentice rhabdomancers are taught in the guild the following tenant:

The fork is held by the two limbs, one in each hand, with the point going first and the rod held horizontally. Then the rhabdomancer walks gently over the places where he seeks an object or affection. He should walk with care to not risk dispersing the emanations that rise from the spot where these things are and cause the rod to slant. For example, if the magician is seeking a deposit of gold ore, upon finding a vein a successful dowsing check reveals the purity of the metal. The proficiency also affects the casting of various divination spells. Some of these are blocked by stonework, thick wood, or metal deposits. A skilled rhabdomancer is able to pierce these "walls" with a successful dowsing check (note the below listing of common Divination spells for those cases in which a dowsing check is required). Otherwise, a DM may call for the rhabdomancer to make a proficiency roll to see if any obscure or additional information is discovered.

Also, using this proficiency, a rhabdomancer can locate the proper sapling with which to craft a suitable divining rod. Rare wood types that could be used in making a rod could quite possibly require a successful Dowsing check. At the DM's discretion, a rhabdomancer may forgo learning a new nonweapon proficiency in order to become better skilled at Dowsing. Each abandoned slot adds 1 to the character's proficiency roll. This allows an edge for high-level rhab-

domancers who remain true to their craft.

Prospecting: This proficiency grants knowledge in the practice of searching for valuable metals and minerals. There are many techniques available, and the character is fairly familiar with those practiced by his culture (or the culture wherein he was taught prospecting). This includes using metal or wood pans and fine meshes to sift through riverbeds and dirt. A successful check performed on a daily or weekly basis indicates that something of worth was found, though usually such results yield only small gains at most.

Rhabdomancer magic

Here are a few spells that rhabdomancers use in pursuit of their craft and while exploring mineshafts and caverns.

Craft Divining Rod

(Alteration, Enchantment)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1 hour

Area of Effect: See below

Saving Throw: None (but see below)

The first task a rhabdomancer must undertake in his career is the finding and crafting of a suitable divining rod. A forked branch of hazel or filbert (the woods of choice) must be found. The length of the rod should be 1½', the whole no thicker than a finger, and the tree it was cut from not more than a year old. Over the next hour as the mage slowly intones the words of the spell, he gently shapes and smooths out the wood with the simplest of tools. At the end of this time, the divining rod is ready to be used. It bears a slight dweomer, as if residual magic is retained by the wood. Of course, the rod can easily be broken, thus sending the rhabdomancer on the search for another sapling. At the DM's discretion, certain woods have different effects when crafted into a divining rod.

For example, ash has long been held to be associated with storms and lightning, and perhaps a rod fashioned from this wood may be used to predict bad weather. Magical trees may be sought after by adventurous rhabdomancers to give them an edge; in such cases the mage must succeed in a saving throw vs. magic while casting this spell. Failure means that the rod is flawed and useless, while success will impart some measure of the wood's magic to the divining rod.

The guilds ensure that all apprentice rhabdomancers learn this spell.

Shield Flame

(Alteration)

Level: 1

Range: 10 yds.

Components: V

Duration: 1 turn + 1 turn per level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One torch-sized flame

Saving Throw: None

Most miners and cavern explorers consider this simple spell far more important than your average mage. When cast, it protects an open flame from exposure to drafts and volatile gases. For the duration of the spell, nonmagical gusts or breezes are unable to extinguish the torch. Any vapors that would normally explode upon contact with fire (such as black damp or carbon monoxide) have no effect on a shielded flame. Of course, the spell may also be applied above ground to areas too windy to hold aloft a lit torch or candle.

Locate Object

(Divination)

Level: 2

Range: 20 yds. per level

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round + 1 round per level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell aids in locating a known or familiar object or site. The rhabdomancer casts the spell while holding aloft his divining rod. As he slowly turns, he feels a tug along the rod's length when he is facing in the direction of the sought-after commodity or place, provided it is within range. The spell can locate such objects as coal, water, tools, or even find a mine-shaft or tunnel entrance. Note that attempting to find a specific site requires an accurate mental image; if the image is not close enough to the actual, the spell may lead the caster astray to the nearest similarity (at the DM's discretion). Unique

Rhabdomancer		Nonweapon Proficiencies		
Name	Group Required	Slots	Relevant Ability	Check Modifier
Dowsing	Wizard	2	Wisdom	- 1
Prospecting	General	1	Dexterity	- 1

Two unique nonweapon proficiencies are listed as part of a rhabdomancer's training. While anyone can learn the trade of a prospector, only the guilds and other rhabdomancers teach the skill of dowsing.

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items desired cannot be located by this spell unless they are known by the caster. The spell can be blocked only by magic (such as the normal reverse, obscure object).

The material components are the rhabdomancer's divining rod and, in cases where a physical object is sought, a small sample of the substance, which is rubbed along the rod's length.

Lesser Rhabdomancy

(Divination)

Level: 3

Range: See below

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1, turn + 2 rounds per level

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This is a more powerful variant of the *locate object* spell, one known and practiced only by rhabdomancers in their pursuit of adventure. Whereas that spell will only dowse for objects and sites, lesser rhabdomancy allows the wizard to divine for creatures, individuals, and locations. During the spell's casting, the rhabdomancer must decide upon what he is seeking. If he is divining for a certain race or creature, the dowsing rod will point and lead to any such if within range of 20 yards per level. An individual or specific place may be named during the casting. No real range is necessary as the dowsing rod will begin tugging to lead in the direction that person or site can be found; if not reached by the end of the spell the rod becomes still. Note that though the caster need never have met or seen either the person and location sought after, he or it must be referred to by name. Thus, using lesser rhabdomancy to hunt down the "captain of the city guard" or "the nearest armory" causes the spell to fail; rather "Captain Jenkins" or "The Shrine of Exegete" would lead the wizard onward.

Protection from Clebes

(Abjuration)

Level: 3

Range: See below

Components: V, S

Duration: 3 rounds + 1 round per level

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: See below

Saving Throw: None

In the early days of mining, it was discovered that certain creatures that seemed to be made from the earth itself would often attempt to halt any digging. At this time, the elemental theory was

not well-known, and such creatures were classified as glebes (from the Old Tongue word for "earth"). Nowadays, scholars realize that such entities are actually minor earth elementals. But to the ancients, they were a threat that needed to be protected against. The first rhabdomancers developed this spell, with its multiple aspects and uses. First and foremost, *protection from glebes* can be cast to provide a globe of protection 10' wide that is centered on the rhabdomancer and moves with him. Any protected individual within this area may break the warding effects by meleeing with a glebe. Otherwise, no creature originating from the elemental plane of earth (whether or not this protects against the para- and quasi-elemental planes alongside is unknown) with eight or less Hit Dice can intrude upon the protected area. In addition, any magical or spell effects cast upon those inside the globe by a "glebe" are saved at +3. The second application of this spell is to create a ward that prevents egress. The caster merely draws a line (no more than 10' long) before him on the ground and incants the spell. Thereafter for the duration of the spell, no glebe can cross this line, and this includes bypassing it by flight or burrowing. Minor protection may also be offered to any item. In such a case, the ward is placed directly on the object, and any glebe that touches the item suffers 1d6 hp damage plus an amount equal to the caster's level, no saving throw allowed. A side effect of this spell that the latter-day rhabdomancers discovered is that individuals so protected receive a +5 on all saves vs. all petrification attempts, whether this be from a creature's gaze or by spell.

Detect Ensorcellment

(Divination)

Level: 4

Range: See below

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 turn

Casting Time: 4

Area of Effect: One creature or object per round

Saving Throw: See below

With this spell, a rhabdomancer can not only determine if a person or object is either *charmed* or *cursed*, but also may gain some insight into the origin of such ensorcellment. The creature (or object in some cases as determined by the DM) is allowed a saving throw vs. spell modified by the difference in levels between the caster of the enchantment or curse and

the rhabdomancer (thus a minotaur under the influence of a 7th-level evil wizard's charm monster would save at -2 if this spell is cast by a 9th-level rhabdomancer). If the saving throw is successful, then the caster only learns of the presence, if any, of ensorcellment but nothing more. A failed saving throw reveals the exact nature of the spell, including effects, duration, and sphere of origin. In addition, the rhabdomancer has a 5% chance per level of further discerning the identity of the ensorcellment's caster. The information discovered would be that of race, class, relative magical strength, and alignment. A dowsing check may also be rolled then and if successful, the location and (common, not true) name of that spellcaster is also learned. Should a creature or object be under more than one magical effect, a dowsing check is necessary to pierce each such spell. A failed roll means that nothing more can be learned after the first charm or curse has been discovered.

Tap Menhir

(Evocation)

Level: 4

Range: See below

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 day per level

Casting Time: 1-3 rounds

Area of Effect: Caster

Saving Throw: See below

This is the first of the spells known to rhabdomancers which allows them to use their dowsing rod to tap into an existing supply of magical energy. Rural traveling mages enjoy the benefits of this particular spell in regions that harbor rings of stone or monoliths. Such formations are often known to contain latent arcane power. Upon casting this spell, the rhabdomancer has a time period of one day per level to find a suitable menhir, with his dowsing rod leading him in the proper direction. Once at such a site (the spell must be cast again should the duration have run out), the mage can use his rod as a channel between his person and the menhir. Due to the unnatural energies that coarse through his person drawn from the menhir, a system shock roll is required. A failed roll means that the caster could not contain the arcane energy in his person and suffers a loss of half his current hit point total. But should the rhabdomancer be successful, the tapped energy grants him several benefits.

Firstly, the instant recollection of any 1st-level spells used in the past 24 hours.

Next, the caster grows in Strength 1-4 points, while he recovers a number of hit points equal to double that amount. Finally, the mage makes all saving throws at a +1 bonus. The additional might and saving throw bonus last only a number of days equal to half the caster's level. No benefits are gained if this spell is intoned again before the benefits of first casting have yet to expire. Not all mages contain a reservoir of magic necessary for this spell. Some may even have a limited pool to draw from and may be drained after only a few castings.

Greater Rhabdomancy

(Divination)
Level: 5
Range: See below
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 5
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

A more potent version of the *lesser rhabdomancy* spell, this spell allows the wizard to search for a desired physical object, a place or person or creature, a magical effect, or even an affection or quality not discovered by normal divination means. Thus, the rhabdomancer may use his rod and this spell to seek out a silver vein in a mineshaft, ferret out thief in a town, discover the site of a dimensional vortex, or even find true love. The caster need only hold out his divining rod, mentally picture the desired end of the spell, intone the words, and rotate until he feels the tuggings in the wood that show the direction he must travel to find what is sought. Obviously, certain applications of this spell require the forethought and attention of the DM. Due to this, and the fact that greater rhabdomancy is infallible unless disturbed or dispelled by other magic, the duration of the spell can be as long as the DM feels necessary; while the desired end may be found, the hunt may take far longer than the wizard wishes or can handle. But many an adventure has occurred along the trail to whatever is being sought.

Dweomer Divest

(Evocation)
Level: 6
Range: 20 yds.
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: See below
Saving Throw: Negates

This is perhaps the most infamous spell in a rhabdomancer's possession. Using this powerful magic, the wizard can steal away the dweomer from an enchanted object and use it for his own ends. The caster must aim his dowsing rod at the magical item and intone this spell. Then he must make a saving throw vs. magic adjusted as listed below:

Item	Adjustment
wand or rod	none
staff	-2 on save
potion	-2 on save
ring	-4 on save
miscellaneous	-4 on save
arms/armor	-6 on save
artifact	spell fails

The rhabdomancer's saving throw determines the spell's effects. An abysmal failure, a roll of 1 (which may be a modified roll), means that the magic was stolen, but the power cannot be contained or controlled by the caster, and the magic "detonates" on the caster. Offensive spells are resolved normally, though the rhabdomancer still receives any relevant saving throws. Other magical effects are twisted so as to be detrimental in some fashion to the mage (for example, an *invisibility* spell divested from a ring may only cause the caster to be invisible to his own sight!). A failed saving throw, but not an abysmal roll, results in no power being divested, and the caster suffers a -2 on all saves against that item should it later be used against him for a period of 24 hours. A successful saving throw indicates that a small portion of that item's power is taken by the rhabdomancer. Defensive magic (like that of a *cloak of protection*) is automatically applied to the caster. All other magic is released immediately in the segment following the *dweomer divest*, with the subject/target of the spell at the rhabdomancer's whim. All stolen magic functions at a level of ability equal to 6th for wands, 8th for rods, 12th for potions, rings, staves, and miscellaneous items; this affects duration, range, and possible inflicted damage (though some offensive spells, like *fireball*, will still have an instantaneous effect).

A phenomenal success, a natural roll of 20, means that the rhabdomancer has greater control of the magic. As long as the dweomer is not from the schools of Conjuraction/Summoning or Illusion, and the DM can assign it a spell level that has been already mastered by the mage, the caster may choose to memorize the magic rather than immediately cast it. Of course, if the rhabdomancer has already in mind his full complement of 2nd-level

spells and lifts the dweomer from a *continual light* sphere, he cannot choose to memorize that stolen spell. A potion that has been divested loses the equivalent of one dose, while charged items lose one charge with each successful casting of this spell. All other items become non-operational for 1d4 rounds following the casting should their dweomer be lifted.

Mine the Earthspark

(Evocation)
Level: 8
Range: See below
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 day per level
Casting Time: 2-5 rounds
Area of Effect: Caster
Saving Throw: See below

This rare spell shows obvious dwarven influences; indeed, it can be cast only in the dwarven tongue. It leads a rhabdomancer toward scarce areas underground where magical power is held deep within the earth. Some sages may call such deposits Nodes or Sarsens, and they can be magically tracked down via the lines of power and emanations radiating from them. The dwarves have another name for them: Hordask Thar'dik, or Seat of the Earthspark.

Should the rhabdomancer finally arrive at such a site and the spell duration has not expired, he may seek to draw out some of the vast arcane energy of the sarsen through his dowsing rod and into his person. This is dangerous, as a mortal shell was not built to contain such power. The wizard must make an immediate system shock roll to survive tapping the Earthspark. Failure means death, as the body is blackened from the vast power drawn.

Should the roll be successful, the benefits are many. The rhabdomancer's Strength and Constitution instantly are increased to 18. Any wounds the caster may have suffered are healed, scars vanish, and even lost fingers, toes, ears, or eyes are regenerated. The rhabdomancer seems to seethe with an unnatural power that can cause *awe* or *fear* (depending upon the character's actions) in any individual or creature below 4th level or four Hit Dice.

Because the Earthspark is connected with the energies of the elemental plane of earth, all spells cast by the rhabdomancer that deal with earth, dirt, or stone have double the normal area of effect and duration. Also, creatures from that plane will not attack the caster, either out of respect or fear (if an opposing align-

ment), except in self-defense. Any attempt to petrify the caster ends in failure. The power of the Earthspark remains with the rhabdomancer for a number of days equal to his level halved. No benefits are gained if this spell is intoned again before the benefits of first casting expire. Some dwarven scholars have suggested that continued exposure to the Earthspark corrupts a man, turning him miserly and mean-spirited. This may be true, for obviously, the location of any sarsen is a prize much sought after by high-level rhabdomancers, and such mages jealously guard the site with traps and even creatures, hoping to protect their claim from other rhabdomancers seeking power.

Other spell use

Spells useful and not

As mentioned in the kit description, rhabdomancers may gain additional benefits to some Divination spells when cast with the aid of a divining rod as follows:

Detect magic: The rhabdomancer has a 20% chance per level to recognize the type of magic (alteration, conjuration, etc.), if any, present. With a successful dowsing check, he may recognize a spell/magical effect encountered before.

Detect undead: Rhabdomancers have a 5% chance per level of discerning the exact nature and number of undead, any, present.

Identify: Normally, a rhabdomancer has no benefit in the casting of this spell, except that due to his specialization in the use of a divining rod, he has a slight edge in the identification of magical rods and wands (staves are not included); the loss of Constitution due to casting is only 4 points.

Read magic: There is no additional benefit when this is cast by a rhabdomancer.

Detect evil/good: With a successful dowsing check, the rhabdomancer can discern the exact sort of evil (cunning, murderous, necromantic, treacherous, unholy, etc.) or good (blissful, generous, holy, kind, etc.) present.

Detect invisibility: As long as the rhabdomancer holds his divining rod, the invisible or hidden is revealed to him.

ESP: Rhabdomancers gain no benefit in casting this spell so they rarely learn it.

Know alignment: The subject of this spell receives a penalty on his saving throw equal to the rhabdomancer's level.

Locate object: See the reworked spell listed above.

Clairaudience and Clairvoyance: Rhab-

domancers gain no benefit in casting these spells so they rarely learn them.

Detect scrying: The scryer suffers a penalty to their saving throw to resist being revealed equal to half the rhabdomancer's level (round fractions up).

Magic mirror: Few rhabdomancers use this spell, so there is no benefit to casting this spell. (Actually, casting this spell may harm the mage's reputation!)

Contact other plane: Rhabdomancers rarely have much dealings with extraplanar creatures, though they certainly welcome insight from the elemental plane of earth. As such, they have no benefit in casting this spell. With a successful dowsing check, the rhabdomancer gains some small insight into the sort of being contacted (relative power, intelligence, alignment, etc.).

False Vision: Since rhabdomancers cannot fathom magic that distorts or obscures divination, this spell cannot be learned.

Legend Lore: Rhabdomancers gain no benefit in casting this spell.

True Seeing: Only as long as the rhabdomancer holds his rod, he has *true sight*

Vision: Rhabdomancers gain no benefit in casting of this spell, so they rarely learn it.

Screen: Since rhabdomancers cannot fathom magic that distorts or obscures divination, this spell cannot be learned.

Foresight: Only while the rhabdomancer holds his rod, he gains the insight the spell offers. He may also choose to switch the object of the spell once a round, but each time this is done it lessens the spell duration by one round.

Rhabdomancer guild spells

Exploring mineshafts and caverns regularly means that certain spells become more useful than others. Here follows a listing by level and name of some wizard spells that a rhabdomancer may be offered by the guilds, and their most common uses. The list does not include spells greater than 4th level, as they are often of such power that they are not always taught by the guild, and their effectiveness underground is often more obvious (a *passwall* spell for example, or *dig*).

First level

Affect normal fires: This may help to illuminate large areas without the need for many lamps.

Light: This spell provides the perfect illumination, one that is proof against flammable gases and holds no risk of suffocating the user.

Mending: This can be used to repair cracks in support beams.

Reduce (the reverse of *enlarge*): This spell is perfect for the removal of debris and loose rock.

Tenser's floating disc: This is a useful means for bearing any ore or precious findings out of the earth without a cart.

Second level

Continual light: See *light*, above.

Levitate: This is useful for lifting heavy rocks and the like.

Strength: As many of the endeavors underground may be physical and require additional strength, this can be of assistance.

Third level

Feign death: This may be used to effect a cataleptic state when threatened with harmful gases or a lack of oxygen.

Gust of wind: This is an excellent means to flush away harmful vapors and provide fresh air to mineshafts.

Infravision: This spell provides an obvious means for sight in the Underdark.

Item: This allows for inventive uses such as turning a stout beam into a portable brace when needed or carrying great lengths of rope or chain without encumbrance.

Slow: This spell affects a target's breathing, thus allowing the individual to operate in places with less oxygen.

Windwall: This presents yet another means to keep harmful gases at bay.

Fourth level

Dig: This spell's usefulness is clear.

Polymorph self: When escape is necessary or for exploration of the caverns, an animal form may be best.

Vacancy: After the discovery of a rich vein or sarsen, this spell allows the caster's "claim" to go unmolested by trespassers.

Like all magic, the usefulness of a divining rod is, in truth, limited only by the determination and imagination of its wielder. With the challenges that exploring underground offers, a rhabdomancer finds not only his skills but also his personality a welcome asset to an adventuring party.



Steve Berman is a freelance writer based in New Jersey. His work has been published in many gaming magazines; this marks his third appearance in the pages of DRAGON® Magazine.

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Phantastic advice from Emil Duli Wonk's traveling illusionist seminar

Illusions of Grandeur

by Rogers Cadenhead

illustrated by Robert Lessl

Cracky the Hooded One hurried to the meeting hall, a printed invitation clutched in his hands. "Friend, you're missing the opportunity of a lifetime if you miss Emil Duli Wonk," the invitation stated. "The master mesmerist will be appearing before the East Westgate Illusionists' Guild tonight to present his seminar, 'How to Fool Most of the People All of the Time.' Duli Wonk will also be giving a practical demonstration of his techniques. Carrot cake and drinks will be served. Only a geas should prevent you from attending this special event."

Handing 50 gold coins to a sleepy dwarven usher in the lobby, Cracky strode excitedly into the speaking hall. He had never attended an event in the building before, but it was packed with his phantasmal peers. "We're just about to start," the dwarf told him. "Sit anywhere you like, and by all means have some cake."

Cracky found a seat and was chowing on cake as a lean, gray-haired gentleman stood up before the members of the guild. "Greetings, people of East Westgate. My name is Emil Duli Wonk. Some call me genius. Others call me visionary. Some terribly mistaken children in cities I have visited even call me dad. But none shall ever call me illusionist."

The crowd quieted down as Emil Duii Wonk ushered a dwarf onstage and continued to speak.

Practice your delusions

You're probably asking yourselves why I stand before you and deny my chosen profession. We are illusionists, are we not? Masters of mesmerism! Poets of perception! I brought my associate onstage to explain myself better. This dwarf is my friend Dave. Before he came to work for me, he was a thief.

Dave robbed people to make his living.

Back in those days, when someone asked Dave about his job, what do you think he said? Was it, "Hi, I'm in thievery. I'd be happy to

watch your things while you go and powder your nose." Or could it have been, "Howdy, chum. I burgle and mug. Nice ring you got there."

As you may have theorized, both of these guesses are incorrect. Dave lied about his job because honesty was terrible for his business. He told strangers that he was self-employed in the acquisitions industry.

By the same principle, you should not be calling yourselves "illusionists." You are in the business of fooling people. Every person who knows you fiddle with phantasms is a harder person to fool.

That's bad for you. It's bad for all of us, in fact. You've made it even worse here in East Westgate with the name of your guild. I'll bet your group has trouble getting people to accept your payments. It's probably even harder to find dates for your club socials. No one wants to kiss a prince who turns into a frog when he ceases to concentrate.

The first lesson I would like to teach tonight is this: You are not an illusionist. The biggest phantasm you will ever cast is not a spell. It's the trickery you use to hide your chosen profession.

Moonlight as a mage

I call myself a mage. This is easy to do. First off, I learn non-illusory spells and I put them to use often. I'm not able to cast spells of necromancy, abjuration, invocation, or evocation, but there's plenty of other magic available. My personal favorites are enchantment spells.

Secondly, I carry around lots of spell components — my pockets are stuffed with insect parts, powdered gemstones, and other tidbits. One thing I always keep on hand is plenty of bat guano.

Yes, guano.



I keep it with me for two reasons.

First, guano convinces people you're a mage, because no one else would carry this stuff around. Guano also keeps people at a distance, since no one wants to pal around with an adventurer who smells.

That explains a lot, those of you in the front row must be thinking. Feel free to change seats at any time. Distance is one of the best friends of an illusionist. The less you know about me, the more I'm able to play inside your head.

In addition to posing as a mage, you can also put together a decent impression of a cleric. It can be effective to portray a priest or perhaps find a real one to team up with.

Priests are able to use their spiritual connections to cast spells, and many of these acts are nothing short of miraculous.

Think of how healing would be perceived if accompanied by an illusion of holy significance. In the right environment such as a rural enclave of inbred, impressionable gnolls — or any university campus — illusions may be perceived as religious visions.

By delivering miracles on demand to a superstitious group, you can attract hordes of true believers who are receptive to your whims. Train them as a strike force. Keep them as pets. My personal favorite is to bankrupt them.

When you're able to create visions, you're also able to collect offerings. This can be a lucrative operation if you are willing to accept the possible downside. Getting caught in this effort can result in charges of heresy, a guided tour of a sacrificial altar, and a spot on the business end of divine intervention. Take it from me — I've been through all three, and they make pockets full of guano look pretty good by comparison.

As an alternative to mimicking spell-casting professions, you might want to adopt a guise with a lower profile. Being a merchant can be lucrative, especially if you've got something to sell.

The best part of sales is that your products don't have to be good, and your prices don't have to be competitive. With a few well-timed illusions and an enchantment spell like *charm person*, you could peddle summer homes in Gehenna and fresh fruits hand-picked by unsanitary *svirfneblin*. It's the best high-margin sales opportunity since life insurance policies in Ravenloft.

There are other professions to hide behind, but the point ought to be clear

by now: Anyone who says he is an illusionist is either a liar or a fool. People who actually are illusionists should be only liars.

When disbelief isn't suspended

My fellow illusionists, we should also be paranoid. I have been tossing out phantasms for more than four decades, and I have spell components older than most of you. No one gets to be an old illusionist without a healthy amount of self-doubt, outright cowardice, and good foot-speed.

To illustrate my point, I would like to introduce my associate, Frampton the Brave. Dave, please bring me that tarnished silver urn.

These ashes are all that remain of Frampton. He and I were adventuring together back in the days when the Caves of Chaos were just the Pair of Neutral Caves with Chaotic Tendencies.

I remember the details as if it were yesterday. Frampton, I, and a small band of edged-weapon fanatics were heading into a kobold enclave near Green Plume Mountain. The kobolds had allegedly been hoarding women and kidnapping gold. We raided their lair, but after things got bad, our warriors beat a hasty retreat. I beat an even hastier one.

Frampton, however, believed that he could stem the onrush of little hairy antagonists with an elaborate illusion of a rival band of orcs — broad-snouted pig-men with arms the size of legs and hairy moles bigger than some of the kobolds.

It was a wonderful, captivating phantasm displaying a full palette of colors and a good use of white space. Frampton had been working on it for weeks.

How could he have known that these kobolds were from a rare subclan that had championed the use of home schooling? The kobolds sent Frampton's remains back to us in this urn after we returned their valuables and signed a contract assuming legal responsibility for all repairs required to fix their lair.

I'm still making payments.

If Frampton were here, he would tell you one simple truth. As it is, I must use the lid of this urn to paraphrase him: "Less is more." Frampton says to us! A moderately difficult, plausible illusion is usually better than an elaborate, implausible one.

The appearance of a phantasmal bat

dropping from a cavern ceiling can distract an opponent and provide an advantage in combat. It isn't likely to be doubted, and if the illusion is disbelieved, it may seem as if the bat simply flew away.

A phony fire-breathing dragon is much more likely to be discovered. An illusionist usually doesn't get to spend quality time around these monsters eyeballing their movements and mannerisms. This makes it more likely for someone to disbelieve what they're seeing.

An even bigger concern is if the illusion is dispelled and this fact becomes readily apparent to everyone in the vicinity. Losing a grandiose phantasm is like painting a big sign on your forehead that reads, "Illusionist here: Unarmored and Mostly Harmless."

When this happens, it is often fortuitous to have included the illusionist in the illusion. You ought to know how to fake your own movements, since you've gotten a pretty good look at yourself over the years. I spend many an hour casting admiring glances at myself in the mirror, and — though it cost me a marriage — it helped my abilities a great deal.

I never choreograph a complicated phantasm without including myself in the scene. If the star of the illusion flubs a line or makes some other revealing mistake, there's a chance that the angry audience will turn its wrath on my phantom duplicate. I'm happy to let him take the blame, and it often gives me time to let my sprinting ability do its magic.

We illusionists think of our craft as coming strictly from the brain — yanking wonderfully convincing visions out of it like a stage magician pulls land-based mammals from a hat. This is a good attitude to have if one likes to travel light. No muss, no fuss, no large spell components to lug around.

The real brainwork, however, comes from using raw materials to complement the illusion.

The proper use of props

If you make your surroundings a part of the spell, anyone who doubts the surroundings will find them to be real. This leaves them more susceptible to the stuff that's fake.

A case in point: Every beginning phantasmist dreams of casting an illusory bridge over a chasm, fooling enemies into getting halfway across before revealing the ruse. In my own youth, I

Spells from the tome of Emil Duli Wonk

Ever-changing Self

(Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 4

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 hour/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: None

This spell gives the spellcaster or a creature touched a physical appearance that slowly changes over the full duration of the illusion. The alterations in appearance can include shifts in facial feature, hair color, weight, clothing, and equipment. The creature's race can even be changed, though both the original and altered forms must be human, demi-human, or humanoid.

At the time of the casting, the spellcaster must decide what changes in form will occur — for instance, a fair-skinned, thin rogue could end up as a portly, bearded merchant. There can be more than one major shift during the duration of the spell, so a dwarf could shift into a gnome and then an elf during the span. If the spell has been cast upon a creature, the spellcaster does not need to be present after *ever-changing self* has been cast. Unwilling creatures get a save vs. spell to prevent the illusion from being cast upon them. If the save fails, a recipient might not be aware of his *ever-changing self* without looking into a mirror or consciously looking over his appearance.

Those seeing an ever-changing self do not get a chance to disbelieve the illusion unless one of two conditions is met: They are in constant sight of the individual for at least one hour, or they are of high enough Hit Dice to have a chance to notice invisible creatures. In either case, a saving throw vs. spell reveals the true form of the individual underneath a semi-transparent vision of the *ever-changing self*.

Like *change self* however, this spell cannot be used to mimic a specific individual, and it does not convey any abilities of the altered form.

Fools' Copper

(Alteration, Illusion)

Level: 2

Range: 10 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 hour/level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 10 cubic inches per level

Saving Throw: Special

This spell is the reverse of *fools' gold*, making items appear less valuable to creatures viewing them. The disguise does not alter the nature of the item (gold is still gold, diamonds are still diamonds), but it lowers the perception of an item's quality. A jewel-encrusted golden ring could be made to look like a plain iron band with this spell, and a rune-carved paladin's long sword could appear as a rusty peasant's blade. The saving throw and other elements of the spell are the same as *fools' gold*, including the use of powdered gemstones to make the spell harder to detect.

Nystul's Magical Mask

(Illusion)

Level: 2

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 day per level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Special

This spell has the opposite effect of *Nystul's magical aura*, covering up the aura of a magical item of five pounds weight per level of the spellcaster. If an *identify* spell or other similar means is used to determine whether the item is magical, there is a 50% chance that the ruse is revealed. If not, all examinations of the item find it to be non-magical in nature. This spell does not work on extremely powerful magical items such as artifacts.

The components for this spell are a lump of coal and a drop of sour milk.

Phantasmal Pose

(Illusion)

Level: 1

Range: 60 yds. + 10 yds. per level

Components: V, S

Duration: 10 seconds per level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: The caster

Saving Throw: None

The *phantasmal pose* spell creates a simple illusion of the spellcaster standing still, in either a battle ready or disinterested-looking pose, at the point where the spell was cast. If the caster

stays within a 5'-radius of his illusory duplicate, he is invisible and inaudible during the duration of the spell. This provides an opportunity to cast a spell or take another action without being seen or heard. Once this action has been completed, or the duration is reached, the duplicate vanishes. It also vanishes if the spellcaster moves farther than 5' away from the illusion.

The illusion of the spellcaster is only visual and limited to one of the two poses. As stated above, it makes the actions of the spellcaster silent within a 5' radius of the spot where the duplicate stands. No others are affected by this silence. There is no saving throw.

Spectral Farce

(Alteration, Illusion)

Level: 3

Range: 60 yds. + 1 yd. per level

Components: V, S

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: 40' cube + 10' cube per level

Saving Throw: Special

The *spectral farce* spell is an illusion that makes images appear less believable, whether the images are real or illusory. If the images are real, the spell gives onlookers a reason to believe that they are fake. For example, *spectral farce* could make a charging red dragon's movements seem unrealistic, and also silence the sound of its claws raking against stone as it landed in a cavern. This could make enemies of the dragon believe that its an illusion and take actions to disbelieve its existence.

If the images are illusory, the *spectral farce* spell can be highly effective at promoting disbelief. It grants a +4 saving throw when determining whether a viewer believes an illusion is real. If the viewer has already failed a saving throw, there is a chance that another saving throw will be allowed after *spectral farce* is cast. The chance is equal to 50% plus the level of the spellcaster.

This spell can have all of the elements utilized in a *spectral force* spell, including sight, sound, smell and heat. Sometimes these are used primarily to mask an element, such as the case above where a dragon's claws were silenced.

spent many days dreaming of methods to turn my enemies into canyon pasta.

Sadly, the bridge trick does not work, because we can't fool gravity.

An illusionist can, however, make an unsturdy bridge appear like one that is safe to cross. This has the same effect as the fully illusory bridge, especially if the illusionist has taken the time to sabotage it!

If you travel with companions, you can also supplement their homicidal tendencies. One of my favorite uses of real props is to give an archer pinpoint accuracy. Back in my days with Frampton, we were accompanied by a crossbow-wielding mercenary who called himself Igor the Intimidator.

A better name would have been Igor the Inaccurate, because head injuries had done something terrible to his depth perception. When it appeared that Igor had little chance to connect with his crossbow — such as any time he took aim at groups of fewer than 12 — Frampton and I liked to better his odds with phantasmal force spells.

Igor supplied the whirr of a bolt heading toward the enemy, and the intimidating grunt of a warrior with the utmost confidence in his abilities. Our illusions supplied the sight of a bolt that connected in an ugly and particularly damaging manner.

This gambit could only be used when it was extremely important, but Igor began to think that he was a "gamer" who came through in clutch situations. Others came to believe it as well — Igor is now conducting his own speaking tour for aspiring archers.

The use of your surroundings can have other practical applications for an illusionist. Since I spend a great deal of time fleeing, I've found a way to avoid even the tracking ability of a ranger.

The *vacancy* spell makes it much harder to be followed. All tracks in an area 70' in radius or more can be wiped out by this spell, because it makes the affected area appear long unused. The likelihood of a tracker disbelieving is slim, because the lack of tracks is hardly a surprising occurrence. *Hallucinatory terrain* is another spell that is useful in this instance.

The common element to all of these suggestions is to think small. You will never believe how successful you can be if you lower your expectations. My ex-wives would have been happier women if they had learned this valuable truth.

With that in mind, you are in the right

frame of mind to buy my spell collection. Dave and the rest of my associates are passing around order forms for illusions that I have compiled over the years. None is particularly powerful, but each should give you ideas for their use. Unfortunately, I have yet to come up with something that increases my time in the 40-yard dash. I've got a team of gnomes working on that one as we speak.

For a limited time only

The spell book is only 399 gold pieces, and there's a foreword to this edition penned by the hand of Bigby himself! if you act now, I'll toss in a shipment of guano from the Isle of Dread. You won't get better results from any other bats, for the fiber-rich diet of these rodents is the stuff of legend!

Be all that you can see

Now that you've had some time to look over the spell list, and all of the carrot cake is gone, its time to bring this seminar to a close. If you take nothing else home with you from this event, and you might not, take home a heightened sense of what is possible in your profession.

Illusionism is something greater than a specialized field of magic — it is a way of looking at the world. Sometimes, the best spells you can cast are those that increase your own perceptive abilities. One of my favorites, the 2nd-level spell, *Lorloveim's creeping shadow*, grants the ability to see, hear and speak through the vantage point of the caster's own shadow.

With this spell and a common household lantern, you can make a pretty good living in the eavesdropping business. You can also get a better look at things you want to recreate with a spell.

A great bard, Wilhelm of Stratford, once said, "There are more things on heaven and earth, Alphonse, than are dreamt of in your imagination." This may be true for everyone else, but it is decidedly false for the practitioners of the arts phantasmal.

Anything you may envision can come to be, my friends. If you can see it, you can be it. If you can view it, you can do it. If you can bespy it, you can try it. If you can observe it, you can... well, I had better wrap this up.

You've been a terrific audience, East Westgate. Good night, and don't forget to tip your server!

As his ushers filed out of the hall, Emil Duli Wonk bowed before the hearty applause of the East Westgate Illusionists' Guild. "Before you go, we have to resolve the matter of my speaking fee," he said.

"But we already paid," stammered Kracky the Flustered One, his hood resting on his shoulders and the invitation in one hand.

"Admission was paid for" Emil replied. "Departure will cost you." The wooden walls of the meeting hall vanished as the master mesmerist let some phantasms terminate. Iron bars were revealed underneath, and it became obvious that the guild members had wandered into a prison cell built inside a spacious warehouse. Dave the acquisitions expert slammed shut the gate to the cell.

"If you'll each kindly donate, say, 10 additional gold coins to the Emil Duli Wonk Aged Illusionist Relief Fund, my entourage and I will be off to our next engagement," Emil announced. "Toss the coins through the bars, and if you don't have the hard currency, give something of comparable value. Don't be stingy, or we'll make you toss out spell books."

Emil Duli Wonk stood on the podium while the illusionists of East Westgate emptied their pockets, belt pouches, satchels and handbags. One man overturned the contents of his hollowed-out wooden leg. Short of coins, Kracky tossed out with much reluctance his lucky rabbits foot with gold embossing. As Kracky watched Dave pocket the item, Duli Wonk continued to speak.

"This situation brings to mind a point about creating illusions that no one has a reason to disbelieve. I must've skipped over that notecard this evening"

Kracky the Frenzied One pulled up his hood and leapt onstage to throttle the guest speaker like a wrinkled gray maraca. He leapt right through Emil's body and it vanished.

"Thank you, East Westgate!" Emil's disembodied voice echoed throughout the warehouse. "Emil has left the building."

After he got home, Kracky ordered Emil Duli Wonk's spell collection.



Rogers Cadenhead is an Illinois-based gamer and freelance writer.



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Curses

Foiling for a spite

by Ed Rice

illustrated by Tom Baxa

"That blasted paladin has thwarted my plans for the last time, Cletus!" the lich fumed. "I'm going to make his life completely and utterly miserable."

"What horrible fate shall you visit upon him this time, master?" his quasit familiar asked.

"I'll kidnap his loved ones."

"Master," the quasit said, "You have already done this."

"Then, I'll simply annihilate them."

"Once again, you have already done this."

"A blight upon his homeland?"

"Did that."

"A debilitating pox upon his person?"

"Yup."

"Report him to His Majesty's Tax Collector for income tax evasion?"

The quasit smiled. "I still remember the expression on the knight's face when they showed up."

"So how about a curse?" the lich suggested.

"Oh, sure," the demonling sneered. "Minus two to hit and minus two to his saving throws; that's sure to kill him."

A snap of the lich's fingers sent the familiar flying across the room, crashing into the cold stone wall. The undead mage rubbed his skeletal hands together and glared menacingly at the quasit. "No, Cletus, I have something more sinister in mind for the meddlesome crusader this time."

Has this ever happened to you? You want a villain to throw a curve into a player character's well thought-out plans, so you have the villain cast a *curse* upon him. While a small change in the PC's attack rolls and saving throws causes a few problems once in a while, it never seems to be quite as devastating as you intended.

With this in mind, let's take a new look at curses and how they work. A *bestow curse* spell currently exists as the reverse of the *remove curse* spell. For the sake of this article, we will assume them to be different spells.



Two new spells are needed to make curses function properly. They are *bestow minor curse* (a replacement for the existing 3rd-level priest and 4th-level wizard *bestow curse* spells) and *bestow major curse* (a new 7th-level spell for priests and a 9th-level spell for wizards).

Minor curse spells are not life threatening, nor are they able completely to physically incapacitate a character. *Major curse* spells, while not necessarily life threatening to the cursed character, can be so to others around him. They are also usually permanent.

The attached tables list the curses, minor and major, in their appropriate categories.

The tables are not to be used as a method of random determination for a curse's effect. It is up to the spell caster to determine what curse the recipient receives. Furthermore, it is up to the DM to decide which curses he allows in his campaign. DMs should also consider all the possible repercussions of allowing the PCs the ability to cast these spells.

The only exception to the tables, as far as determining curse effects goes, would be a curse that changes its baneful effect at randomly determined intervals so that one day the victim suffers from X and the next day Y. This variation is available in both the major and minor curse spells. The DM must determine the time periods of each effect and what new effect is gained at the end of each time period.

When considering the game effects, the DM should keep in mind the likely effects of the various curses. Many curses would make it either impossible (or very difficult) to attempt concealment, silence, or other such clandestine activities. Curse effects likely to affect spell-casting would just as likely affect fighting ability, thieving abilities, or other actions.

Bestow Minor Curse

(Abjuration/reversible)

Level: W4/P3

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: One month per level of the caster

Casting Time: 4

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Negates

By touching a victim, the caster bestows a *minor curse* upon him. The caster can choose whatever effect or parameters he wishes from the list above. The victim is allowed a saving throw vs.

Minor Curse Effects

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Adherence | 20. Filthiness | 39. Pathological lying |
| 2. Animal features | 21. Floral hair | 40. Profuse sweating |
| 3. Appendage growth | 22. Forgetfulness | 41. Serpent hand |
| 4. Appendage shrinkage | 23. Generosity | 42. Serpent hair |
| 5. Arthritis | 24. Greed | 43. Shaking |
| 6. Babbling | 25. Hair growth | 44. Slurred speech |
| 7. Baldness | 26. Halitosis | 45. Smoldering |
| 8. Barkskin | 27. Hiccuping | 46. Sneezing |
| 9. Belching | 28. Insatiable appetite | 47. Spike Growth |
| 10. Body odor | 29. Insatiable thirst | 48. Stumbling |
| 11. Brooding | 30. Insomnia | 49. Truth |
| 12. Casting requirement | 31. Invisibility | 50. Uncontrollable laughter |
| 13. Change, skin color | 32. Itching | 51. Unintentional insult |
| 14. Chills | 33. Kleptomania | 52. Vulgarity |
| 15. Continual smiling | 34. Lethargy | 53. Wart growth |
| 16. Disrobing | 35. Metal allergy | 54. Weariness |
| 17. Double vision | 36. Myopia | 55. Weight gain |
| 18. Drooling | 37. Narcissism | 56. Weight loss |
| 19. Elasticity | 38. Nausea | 57. Whistling |

spell; if successful, the curse is negated. The reverse of the spell negates the effects of any one of the following curses.

Effect explanations

Adherence: The cursed one is very "sticky." This means that everything that he touches adheres to him. Alcohol topically applied negates this effect for several minutes. Adhering to large objects can result in the accursed becoming stuck fast. This curse can be designated to affect either the whole body or just part of it.

Animal features: This curse causes the recipient's features (ears, nose, etc.) to become animal-like. Which animal's features are gained is entirely up to the spellcaster.

Appendage growth: One of the accursed's appendages grows to a disproportionate size.



Appendage shrinkage: This is the opposite of appendage growth.

Arthritis: The victim suffers from painful arthritis. The DM must determine the effect on the PC's actions.

Babbling: The cursed individual constantly talks and chatters, unable to remain silent for more than a moment. This causes a 25% chance of spell failure.

Baldness: Rather obvious in its intent, it can also be cast to cause those around the cursed one for any great length of time to suffer baldness.

Barkskin: This causes the accursed's skin to take on the texture and appearance of tree bark. This actually increases the recipient's Armor Class to a base of 6. It also relays a particular weakness to fire, increasing damage by all fire-based attacks by +2 on all dice rolls and lowering saving throws against such attacks by -2.

Belching: As this is uncontrollable, it causes a 25% chance of spell failure during casting attempts. This also makes it hard to Move Silently or remain quiet.

Body odor: The recipient is the unfortunate victim of a repugnant body odor. While not affecting him physically, it lowers Charisma by 4 points.

Brooding: The recipient is continually downcast and suffers from melancholia. This also lowers Charisma by 4 points.

Casting requirements: This sets a series of events (dancing a jig, knocking on wood, etc.) that a spellcaster must perform before or during spell casting for the spell to be effective. (There are unlimited options available for humor and challenge here, especially if you require your player to do the jig his PC is doing.)

Change skin color: This changes the color of the recipient's skin to any tone of the caster's choice.

Chills: The cursed one suffers chills, as with a fever. This lowers his reaction time and drops overall Dexterity by 2 points.

Continual smiling: While not seeming much of a curse, this can result in many a skirmish. Many will be offended by the accursed's constant grin.

Disrobing: The cursed individual will unknowingly take off his clothing during the most inopportune of moments. If this happens while spell-casting, there is a 25% chance of spell failure.

Double vision: This causes attack rolls to be made at -2 and lowers effective Dexterity by 2 points.

Drooling: Uncontrolled drooling lowers a victim's Charisma by 4 points.

Elasticity: This allows the cursed individual to stretch his body beyond its normal parameters. Unfortunately, the body does not return to its normal shape immediately; it takes 1d4 hours to do so after being stretched, during which time Dexterity is reduced by 4 points.

Filthiness: Poor hygiene in the extreme. Regardless of how many times the accursed bathes, he remains dirty. Furthermore, this filthiness extends to the cursed person's clothing. A variation of this curse causes the accursed simply no longer to care about personal hygiene.

Floral hair: This causes one's hair to become like weeds, grass, twigs, and flowers. While possibly raising Charisma toward woodland creatures, it lowers the accursed's Charisma by 4 points in the view of all others.

Forgetfulness: Lapses of memory triggered by certain events or contact with particular objects or creatures incur a 25% chance of spell failure. It can also be bad for non-spellcasters,

Generosity: The cursed individual feels a need to give away everything of value that he owns.

Greed: This persuades the accursed individual to covet anything of value that anyone else owns. Often this leads him to theft.

Hair growth: The cursed person is beset by rapid, uncontrollable hair growth. Regardless of how often the person tries, he cannot control the growth or keep it properly groomed. It should be noted that this hair growth is all over the entire body, not just the head.

Halitosis: The afflicted person is beset with bad breath. This not of the normal variety, though. The bad breath is equal in its effect to a stinking cloud spell.

Hiccoughing: This increases chances of spell failure by 25%. It is similar to belching in that it is difficult to be silent and discrete when one is constantly hiccupping.

Insatiable appetite: The accursed can never satisfy that feeling of overwhelming hunger.

Insatiable thirst: This curse has the same effect as the insatiable hunger curse, except that it causes a thirst that cannot be quenched.

Insomnia: Other than making the PC tired and edgy all the time, insomnia takes away his mental edge. This leads to a 25% possibility of spell failure during casting.

Invisibility: There is no need to describe this curse's effect. However,

consider what it would be like to remain invisible permanently. This causes no physical impairments other than a 2 point penalty when attempting actions requiring a measure of hand-to-eye coordination, and it places a horrible mental strain upon the individual.

Itching: Two forms of this curse are possible. The first involves constant, non-stop itching. The second involves itching only when a set series of events occurs or when the PC is under duress. Both instances reduce Dexterity and attack chances by 2 points and cause a 25% chance of spell failure during casting.

Kleptomania: The victim suffers an irresistible urge to pilfer from others. If he is not a thief, he will not be very good at it, and this could cause problems.

Lethargy: The PC suffers from extreme drowsiness either all the time or under circumstances of extreme duress. Once again, there is a 25% chance of spell failure during spell casting and a -2 penalty to Dexterity and attack rolls.

Metal allergy: Every time the PC touches metal his hand breaks out in hives and blisters.

Myopia: (Extreme near-sightedness.) This reduces attack rolls by 4 points and can wreak havoc when determining the placement of area-effect spells. Be wary of myopic wizards lobbing *fireball* spells!

Narcissism: The PC's extreme vanity causes problems. He is quick to point out his own looks to everyone else while pointing out their flaws. When persons spend any length of time around the cursed PC, they perceive the PC as having a Charisma 4 points lower than normal.

Nausea: The nausea only arises when specific requirements set by the caster of the curse are met (e.g., entering a small room, meeting a dwarf, etc.) reduces the PC's attack rolls by 4 points and creates a 25% chance of failure during spell casting.

Pathological lying: No explanation is necessary to portray what an inability to tell the truth can cause.

Profuse sweating: While not causing any detrimental effects of a physical nature, this curse might have deleterious effects on Charisma.

Serpent hair: A person afflicted with this curse is often mistaken for a medusa by others, who may be prone to attack first and examine the corpse later. The accursed's hair changes into locks of living serpents. These snakes are indeed poisonous to all but the PC, making them hazardous to all who are close to him.

Serpent hand: This curse causes one or both of the victim's appendages to become the maw of a living, poisonous snake. The type of snake is decided by the caster of the curse. The snakes cannot harm the PC, but are not under his control, attacking any who venture too close.

Shaking: Body spasms reduce the victim's Dexterity and attack rolls by 4 points, and cause a 25% chance for error in casting spells with a somatic portion.

Slurred speech: This curse does not affect a character physically, but causes a 25% chance of spell failure during casting.

Smoldering: The curse recipient constantly emits smoke from his skin and hair. This can cause some visual impairment, reducing attack rolls by 2 points and causing errors in distance judgment for spell casting. Furthermore, anyone suffering from this curse has no chance of going undetected unless he is standing downwind in a gale.

Sneezing: Sneezing fits, set to trigger when a particular event occurs or the PC is in a stressful situation, cause a 25% chance of spell failure during casting.

Spike growth: Once cursed, the victim sprouts numerous spikes from all over his body. While the spikes are no danger to the accursed, they can cause serious damage to others (1-4 hp damage per spike.)

Stumbling: This affects manual Dexterity regarding movement. Any walking or running requires a successful Dexterity check made at -2 to avoid tripping over one's own feet. This is in addition to a penalty of -2 to normal Dexterity.

Truth: This is the opposite of pathological lying.

Uncontrollable laughter: Many people find being laughed at insulting. What appears to be a minor curse can have some serious repercussions when the curse causes problems with the wrong persons in the wrong places.

Unintentional insulting: The cursed individual has no control over his tongue when around others. It usually only takes a few curse-inspired insults to cause the PC some major problems.

Vulgarity: Insults can be forthcoming with this curse, but unlike the unintentional insulting curse, profanity is uttered in some form with every breath.

Wart growth: The cursed person becomes covered from head to toes with warts. This reduces Charisma by 4 points.

Weariness: The accursed individual is always tired. This causes a -2 penalty to attack rolls. Furthermore, this curse reduces the PC's Constitution by 2 points. This makes wearing armor or equally heavy objects for long periods of time nearly impossible.

Weight gain: The cursed individual immediately begins to gain weight at a rate of 5 lbs. per day. The curse causes weight gain until the afflicted one is 100 lbs. over his original weight. Of course, clothing and armor no longer fit.

Weight loss: the exact opposite of the weight gain minor curse spell.

Whistling: This curse appears at random times. When it does, it has a 25% chance not only of interrupting the accursed's spell casting but also of interrupting the spell-casting of those in the cursed individual's direct vicinity. This is not likely to build friends among wizards. It also makes it difficult to hide.

Bestow Major Curse

(Abjuration/reversible)

Level: W9/P7

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 8

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Negates

By touching a victim, the caster *bestows a major curse* upon him. The caster can choose whatever effect or parameters he wishes from the list of *major curse* effects. The victim is allowed a saving throw vs. spell; if successful, the curse is negated. The material component required is a personal possession of the target, which is not consumed in the casting. Only a *wish* or the reverse of this spell, *remove major curse*, eliminates any of the *major curse* effects.

Effect explanations

Age progression: This curse ages the PC from 10-60 years (10d6) or the demi-human equivalent.

Age regression: This curse makes the PC younger by 10-60 years (10d6). While this may not seem so bad, imagine having an adult mentality trapped in the body of an infant.

Agonizing pain: The PC is wracked by continual pain. This reduces Dexterity, reaction time, attack rolls, and any saving throws involving Dexterity, all by 6 points. Hit points are reduced by 25% so long as the curse is in effect. Furthermore, any spell-casting has a 50% chance of failure.

Alteration, gender: The permanent change of one's sex can be most disconcerting.

Alteration, race: An elf may become a dwarf; a human a halfling, etc.

Alteration, sub-race: This change involves an alteration within the same genus, as in a change from gold elf to silver elf or green elf to drow. Note the sub-races of humanity fall into this category.

Amnesia: This is a total loss of memory (not survival and self-preservational skills associated with being an adult).

Aura, antipathy: The cursed person radiates an aura that causes creatures surrounding him to have hostile feelings towards the PC. Charisma is virtually 10 points lower than normal, even among close friends and family. All reaction checks register as hostile.

Aura, attraction: Aside from attracting the unwanted affection of everyone the PC comes in contact with, the cursed individual might find himself in the middle of many an armed confrontation between two such creatures wanting the PC's attentions. Note that it is not healthy for some creatures to be too friendly toward the accursed (needle men, etc.)

Major Curse Effects

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Age progression | 14. Conditional petrification | 26. Polymorph |
| 2. Age regression | 15. Confusion | 27. Shrinkage |
| 3. Agonizing pain | 16. Deafness | 28. Touch, chilling |
| 4. Alteration, gender | 17. Deafening voice | 29. Touch, flora wilting |
| 5. Alteration, race | 18. Disfigurement | 30. Touch, petrification |
| 6. Alteration, sub-race | 19. Gelatinous form | 31. Touch, poison |
| 7. Amnesia | 20. Growth | 32. Touch, scorching |
| 8. Aura, antipathy | 21. Halitosis, deadly | 33. Touch, shocking |
| 9. Aura, attraction | 22. Insanity | 34. Touch, withering |
| 10. Blindness | 23. Lycanthropy | 35. Undeath |
| 11. Breathing, air | 24. Multiple personalities | 36. Vulnerability |
| 12. Breathing, water | 25. Muteness | 37. Weakness |
| 13. Conditional death | | 38. Withering |

Blindness: Much like the spell of the same name, this cannot be dispelled by any means other than a wish or a *remove major curse* spell.

Breathing, air: Imagine its effect on a sea dweller, especially if the recently cursed person or creature is underwater at the time the spell is cast.

Breathing, water: This works the same as the air breathing curse, but affects those dwelling on land and breathing air.

Conditional petrification: If the cursed person does a certain act, he turns to stone. The caster decides which effect and the trigger. For example, the PC might turn to stone if he is exposed to direct sunlight. Depending on the nature of the casting of the curse, the PC may or may not know the nature of his problem. A *stone to flesh spell* dispels the effect of this curse.

Conditional death: This is similar to *conditional petrification*, but it is fatal.

Confusion: Whenever the PC comes under circumstances of extreme duress (which, consequently, is often found while adventuring) he acts as if under the effects of a confusion spell.

Deafness: Not being able to hear what is said, having to learn to read lips, and having to discover new ways to be aware of one's surroundings are not enough to stymie any adventurer. The inability to hear one's own words (when unused to being deaf) creates a 25% chance of spell failure during casting. He is also easily surprised (95%) unless he is looking exactly in the direction someone is coming from (in which case he is surprised normally).

Deafening voice: Every word that leaves the PC's mouth comes out deafeningly loud. A whisper sounds like 10 men shouting, a yell like a flight of dragons roaring.

Disfigurement: This is a serious deformation of the cursed person or creature's body.

Gelatinous form: Nearly every being, with the exception of the Tanar'ri lord Juiblex and his contingent of slimes and oozes, agrees that it is a horrible fate to become a blob. Spell casting and weapons use are all but impossible.

Growth: Being giant-sized isn't a problem? What if you're a halfling and are suddenly the size of a hill giant? It is up to the DM whether a PC's clothing and gear grow with him.

Halitosis, deadly: This atrocious case of bad breath has an effect equal to that of a *cloud kill* spell.

Insanity: Often confused with a simple *feeblemind* spell, this curse is much more powerful. Any person attempting to remove the curse by any other means is also affected by the curse if they fail a saving throw vs. magic. One who successfully saves still has a chance of becoming *confused*, as per the spell of the same name. Of course, they are allowed a saving throw to prevent this.

Lycanthropy: This is the familiar, age-old curse. The caster chooses what type of were-creature the accursed becomes.

Multiple personalities: The cursed person might mistakenly assume that he is having bouts of temporary amnesia. Each of his 3-12 personalities has no knowledge of the others' existences nor recollection of memories gained by them.

Muteness: This eliminates ability to cast spells that have a verbal component.

Polymorph: This is another typical curse. Only a *wish* or a *remove major curse* spell can return the PC to normal; one cannot use a *polymorph other* spell to return the accursed to his original form.

Shrinkage: This curse turns a man-sized person into a pixie-sized person, etc.

Touch: Several different *major curses* involve the effect of the PC touching another. While some of these may have beneficial functions in combat, they virtually eliminate social interaction. If there is misuse of the curse (e.g., someone deliberately giving himself or an ally the *major curse shocking touch* and dispelling it after combat), DMs may have the PC feel nauseated, unable to perform any actions for 1d4+1 rounds after each deliberate "use" of *touch major curses*. In any case, gloves or gauntlets do not prevent the curses' effects from being transmitted. DMs may even extend the "touch" to any physical contact, not just hands.

Touch, chilling: The accursed person's touch causes 1-10 hp of freezing damage. This cannot harm undead or creatures immune to cold. While this can be used as a weapon, it causes problems in normal social interaction.

Touch, flora wilting: Often called the druid's bane, this curse is sure to attract the hostile attention of nature lovers, druids, and forest dwellers, and end any career plans in gardening or horticulture.

Touch, petrification: The accursed can turn *flesh to stone* by a simple touch. As with other touch curses, the target of the spell has no control over whom is

petrified by his touch. While this may seem a benefit in combat, it soon proves to be a curse.

Touch, poison: The accursed's touch is instant death. The creatures touched get a saving throw vs. death magic, but this is at a penalty of -4. Undead are not affected.

Touch, scorching: The PC's touch causes 1d10 hp of flame damage and ignites any exposed combustibles. Unfortunately, the cursed PC's clothing and equipment are not immune to the effects of the flames that envelope the PC's hands.

Touch, shocking: The PC's grasp delivers a jolt of electricity to the person or creature touched. This causes 1d10 hp damage. Combustibles on or in close proximity to the PC are ignited.

Touch, withering: The accursed's touch acts exactly like that of a *staff of withering*.

Undeath: This is believed to be how skeleton warriors originated. This curse transforms the PC instantly into an undead creature. He retains all intelligence and former abilities. The accursed is under the caster's control unless the caster does not specify it as so or the caster dies. A *raise dead* spell reverses the curse. DMs may choose to make the undead PC unable to function in daylight, or apply other effects, such as having the PC's body begin to decay or dessicate.

Vulnerability: Superman's bane was kryptonite; what will the PC's be? It is up to the DM to decide what substance weakens and destroys the cursed PC.

Weakness: Similar to the *minor curse* weariness, this is a much more potent spell. The cursed PC is unable to do anything for himself. Constant attention by another will be necessary for daily survival.

Withering: Regardless of how much is eaten or if magical items are employed (such as a *ring of sustenance*), the PC continues to lose weight until he perishes from starvation.



Ed Rice is an optician who lives in Oak Hill, Ohio, with his wife, Dawn, and their two children, Jessi and Charlie. This is his first appearance in DRAGON® Magazine.

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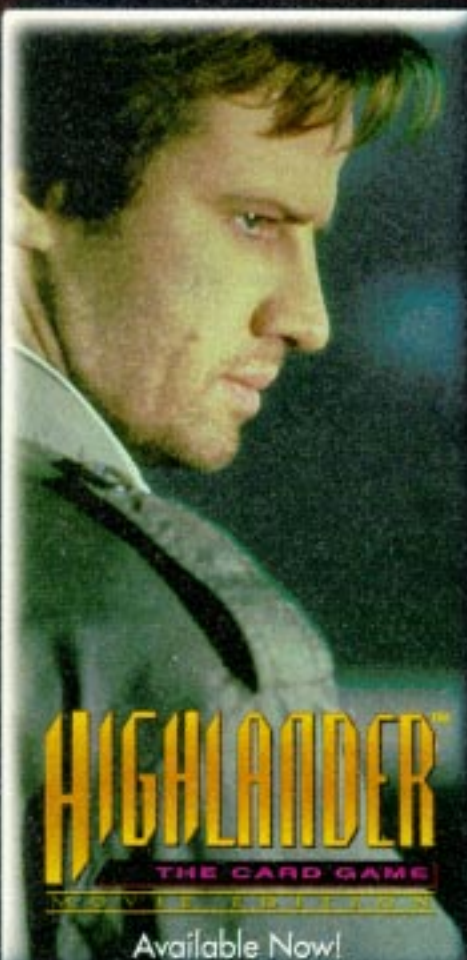
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Magical objects from the India of song and legend

by Michael Selinker

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

The following items can be used in a campaign based on an Indian culture (or can enter other campaign settings, as well). In such campaigns, most items in the AD&D® hardcover books can be used, perhaps with a few modifications (e.g., a manual of stone golems may create a juggernaut, which is from Indian history). Items that recreate spells like rope trick and snake charm are common. Magical weapons and armor are plentiful in Indian legend, including many flaming swords. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to add magical weapons and armor based on items in the article "Rhino's Armor, Tiger's Claws" from *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #189.

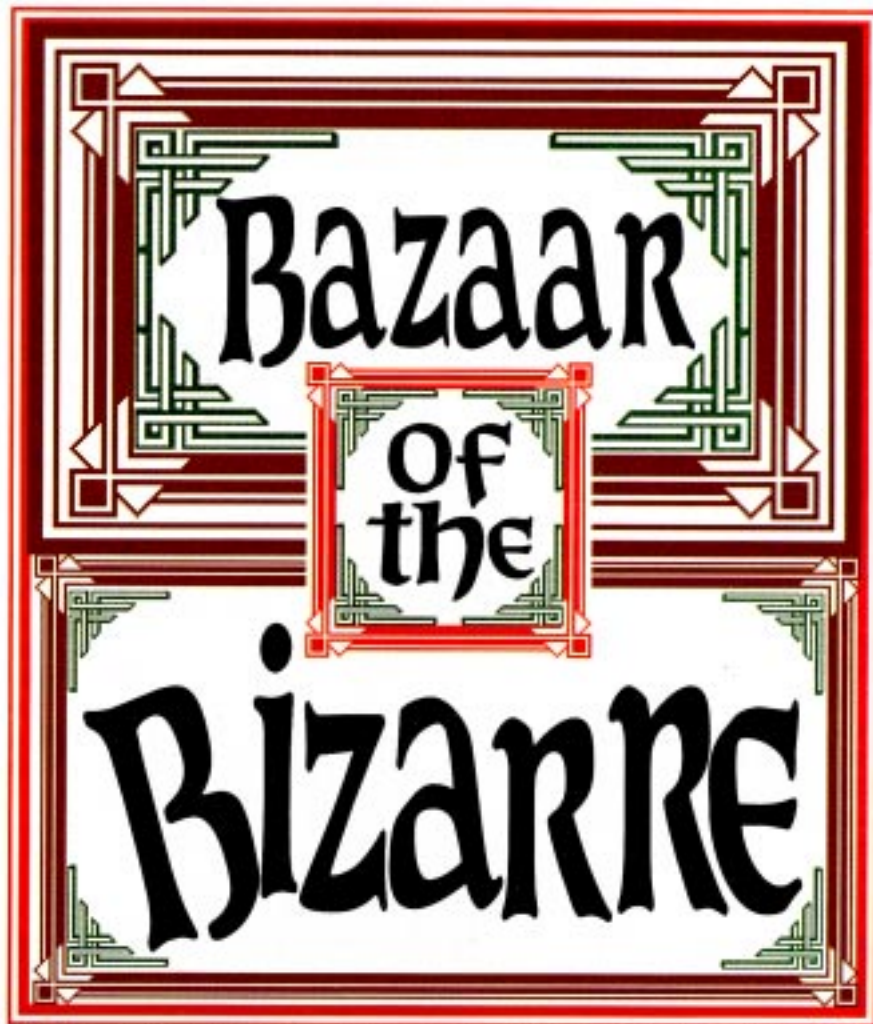
Abkari lotus wine of negotiation

This fruit beverage is used by wine sellers (*abkari*) to ensure smooth business transactions, especially with reluctant partners. When drunk by partners in business dealings, it imparts to all participants a powerful clarity in forging agreements. Anyone under the wine's effects must make a saving throw vs. spell to stall, change the subject, introduce irrelevant issues, or leave the discussions before either a contract is reached or an hour has passed. After an agreement is signed under the influence of the wine, no partner can break the agreement without suffering severe headaches (-2 to Dexterity and Charisma) until the agreement is restored. All effects of the wine can be terminated with a *neutralize poison* spell.

XP Value: 600.

Amrita paste of immortality

If eaten each week and downed with soma-juice (Legends & Lore, page 132), this semi-sweet paste of garlic and honey ensures the character will never die of old age. If a week passes without the



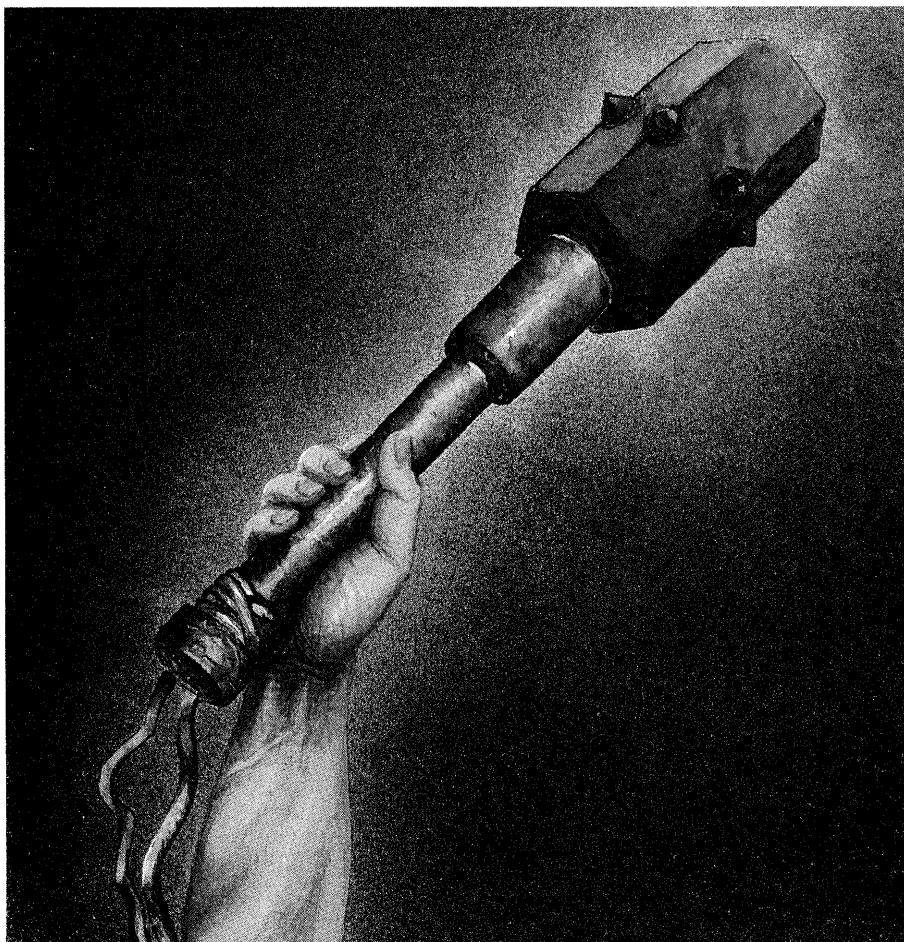
taste of the *amrita*, all benefits of eternal life are lost, and if the ingester has exceeded his maximum lifespan, he dies. While on the paste regimen, no other aging magic affects the character, regardless of whether it adds or subtracts years. The character is still subject to death by disease or murder. Note that the paste does not guarantee eternal youth; the character will look as old as he is.

XP Value: 10,000.

Animated rumal

This 20' strangling cloth of the Thugs can be worn as a kerchief but also can be commanded to attack on its own. It strikes as a 10th-level thief and inflicts 2d4 hp damage on a hit and every round thereafter until destroyed or ordered to cease. The *rumal* can also be programmed to attack the first person to enter an area, but it cannot distinguish between targets in this case. The *rumal* has AC 6 and 20 hp, which can be repaired by a *mending* spell. When animated, the *rumal* has the leverage of an 18 (76) Strength for pulling riders from horses and other maneuvers. It cannot harm non-breathing creatures or those without necks.

XP Value: 1,250.



Anklet of fiery retribution

This jeweled *anklet* is given by one lover to another. If the recipient is killed, fire pours from the heavens in the area of the death. The heavenly flame causes 8d8 hp damage to all within 50' of the body (half on a successful saving throw vs. spells). The super-hot flame is likely to spread very quickly. The wearer's body is always consumed by the flame. The effect occurs regardless of whether the slaying takes place inside or outside. When this happens, the giver of the *anklet* knows it has occurred, but not where or how.

XP Value: 1,300.

Bell of announcement

When this small handbell is rung by someone on a journey, the peal is heard at the destination as well. Those experienced with this device can determine the approximate distance of the traveler by the volume of the peal. No other information can be imparted, though each *bell* has a unique pitch. The *bell's* power can be activated once per day.

XP Value: 800.

Bow and axe of conflicted righteousness

These +3 weapons may be touched only by good characters; others suffer 2d6 hp damage. The *longbow's* string shakes when brought within 100' of any baatezu, tanar'ri, rakshasa, or other evil outer planar creature. An arrow from the *bow* hitting such a creature inflicts triple damage; it also causes the creature to make a successful saving throw vs. spells or return to its home plane.

The *great axe* causes a base damage of 2d6, and can only be wielded by good characters with Strengths of at least 17. The *axe* is Lawful Good, has an Intelligence of 13 and an Ego of 10, and is empathic. The *axe's* special purpose is to defeat paladins and Kshatriya. It can detect paladins and Kshatriya within 10', heal the wielder once per day, and disintegrates paladins or Kshatriya who fail saving throws vs. spell. The weapons are almost never found together.

XP Value: 5,000 for each.

Conch of rending

This massive seashell trumpet is designed for use against extra-planar creatures, especially avatars of deities. When blown, everyone within a half-mile (including the user) must make a saving throw vs. spell or be stunned for 6d6 rounds. Avatars, devas, vampires, and other beings that occupy two planes at once must make a magic resistance check; if the being has, standard magic resistance, there is no save. Unless a successful magic resistance check is made, the being is ripped from the Prime Material Plane and sent to the other plane it inhabits. This usually angers creatures of this level of power, so the user should expect a return visit. If the user fails his saving throw, the conch vanishes.

XP Value: 20,000.

Dhoti of nonviolence

This white *dhoti*, a 5' unsewn cloth which is wrapped around the lower torso, can produce a *sanctuary* - like effect around a person who wears it as his only garment. The *dhoti* instills an aura of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) toward the wearer in all within 50'; those desiring to attack the wearer must make a saving throw vs. spell to do so. Unlike the *sanctuary* spell, the nonviolence aura does not cause the affected creatures to lose track of the wearer. However, the wearer must remain totally allied in the situation; the

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effect is immediately canceled if the wearer takes any action to help or harm anyone.

XP Value: 3,000.

Ebony mace of wavering

This black *great mace* +3 causes a base damage of 2d6 but requires at least a 17 Strength to use. When wielded by a lawful character, the mace also saps one point of karma from anyone it hits, regardless of alignment. (This assumes the character follows karma points; if not, there is no additional effect.) Actual level is unaffected by the mace.

XP Value: 5,000.

Figurines of wondrous power

These figurines are in addition to those listed in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* and *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA™* tome. Each has an XP Value of 100 per Hit Die.

- **Ashoka's lion kings:** At the command word, four smiling lions appear. They are normal adult male lions (AC 5/6, 5+2 HD, normal attacks), but they do not attack unless attacked. Each lion is exceptionally intelligent, Lawful Good, and as versed in the art of oratory as was the wise king for whom they are named. In addition to providing enlightening discourse on kindness and justice, the lion kings can benefit their owner by serving as guards, obstacles, or messengers. The lion kings remain in existence for up to a week, but they can be called only once a month.

- **Bandicoot mount:** This figurine appears as a normal-sized rat when called. A *contingency* effect then casts *reduce* on the owner, shrinking him to 6" tall (a saving throw is allowed if the character is unwilling). The character may then ride the rat through areas too small for normal passage with little chance of detection. The bandicoot mount can be ridden once a day for up to two hours; if it is damaged, both rat and rider revert to their original state instantly.

- **Hanuman monkey:** On command, this representation of the primate general Hanuman turns into a slender, long-tailed monkey. The monkey has an 18 Dexterity and a 95% rating in all thieving skills except Read Languages. The monkey (AC 3, 2 HD, 1 d6/1d6 damage) performs one spying or thieving mission for its owner, retrieving an item or a bit of information before reverting to block form. It can be used once a day.

- **White bull:** When activated, the figurine transforms into a huge white bull. It has AC 4, and 6+6 HD, and it

inflicts 2d6/2d6 hp damage on goring attacks, but it fights only in self-defense. A yoke or plow can be attached to the bull, which can pull up to 10,000 lbs. at a Movement Rate of 12. The bull can be used once a day and transforms back to rock at sundown.

Flute of silence

When a proficient flautist of any class plays this instrument, it plays a music that can be heard only by the dead. This playing has the effect of encouraging undead to move on to their final rest. If the player makes a successful proficiency check, the number rolled is compared to a priests turn undead roll at the character's level. Any undead against whom the roll is successful must make a saving throw vs. spell or be released from unlife, free to be reincarnated or reach eternal peace. Undead who are released either disappear completely or abandon their corporeal frames. This effect works even against undead tied to specific places or wedded to curses and can also eliminate undead in possession of living creatures. The flautist must play the flute for a single round, and any undead creature not released by the playing may attack the flautist.

XP Value: 6,000.

Linen armor of displacement

This black *linen armor* has a base AC of 9 with a bonus of +2. Better than most light quilted linen armors (see the article "Rhino's Armor, Tiger's Claws"), it adds +15% to a rogue's Move Silently and Climb Walls abilities. In addition, the magic on the armor allows the wearer to *dimension door* through any opening he can enter to another opening of the same type within sight. Thus, a wearer could jump through one open window in a room and enter through another, or hop into one large basket and appear in another. The magic works only if the character is completely out of everyone's sight for at least an instant. A rogue may use the magic of this armor at the end of a round where he has attacked.

XP Value: 1,200.

Mandala of psychic devotion

Representing the cosmos, this *mandala* is a 5' diameter red wheel containing several concentric circles and other shapes, each bearing an image of a different god. An ascetic, Yogi, or other psionic character uses this to show his devotion (*bhakti*) to unlocking the secrets of the human mind. When sitting in this

mandala, the user gets a Wisdom check to gain a new spell or psionic devotion when advancing a level. These advancements cannot raise the maximum number of spells per level, nor award new psionic sciences or disciplines.

XP Value: 1,800.

Rani of Jhansi's saddle

(This item is named for the princess, or *rani*, who fought against the British Raj until she was killed in her saddle.) This saddle allows the rider to continue fighting even after he is slain. The saddle animates the rider as long as the battle is joined, allowing combat until the enemy is slain, surrenders or retreats, the rider's side retreats, or the rider's mount is incapacitated. Once any of these conditions occurs, the rider drops dead immediately if he is at zero or fewer hit points. While under the saddle's animating effects, if the rider stops fighting for any reason, he dies instantly.

XP Value: 3,000.

Rod of monsoon control

This powerful and dangerous *rod* can be used only by a mage or a priest with access to the Weather sphere. It cannot be recharged and can only be used in areas conducive to monsoon conditions, generally tropical or subtropical areas near coastlines.

The *rod* creates an ultra-powerful *control weather* effect over an area of between 100 and 1,000 square miles, at the caster's discretion. On the hour after the spell is triggered and every hour thereafter, the precipitation, wind and temperature can each be moved one step in the same direction. The condition of monsoon (one step beyond heavy rain, sweltering heat, and hurricane) may be reached or dispelled. Monsoons cause siege damage as by a screw or drill on all structures and trees in the area of effect, and unmoored ships must all make seaworthiness checks (see *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*, pages 105 and 170).

Creatures that cannot take adequate cover on high ground must make Constitution checks to avoid drowning. At this level of storm, the *rod* user will be playing with the most powerful elemental forces, and must maintain absolute concentration. The caster must make a Wisdom check every hour; if the caster fails the check or is interrupted, the effect either ceases or stays at monsoon level for 1d12 days, if this condition was in effect during use. The caster may expend

another charge and try again in an hour. Monsoons can kill thousands and destroy entire cities, so caution is urged.
XP Value: 15,000.

Sapling wand

This *wand* appears to be a thin and flexible sapling branch, though it has the strength of adamantite. The wand allows the user to expend a charge and ignore all effects of natural or magical wind, from a *gust of wind* spell to an air elemental's whirlwind for 3d4 turns. If two charges are expended, the user can eliminate the wind effect in question; air elementals and such creatures must save vs. wand or be banished. The *sapling wand* may be recharged.
XP Value: 3,000.

Shakuntala's ring of memory

This ring is named for the forest nymph who wore a nonmagical version of it in a classical Indian story. When anyone touches the ring on the wearer's hand, it telepathically communicates to both parties the complete details of all previous meetings. The DM should provide both with any details they cannot remember.
XP Value: 1,000.

Sitar of clarity

A bard or sitarist who makes a proficiency check can use this double-gourd-
strung instrument to weave an effect similar to an *om* spell (see "Arcane Lore: Monsoons and the Power of Om" in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #226). The soothing music can fill an enclosed space or a 100' radius outside. Anyone in that space who is focusing on reading or prayer can do so at a 50% faster pace (including regaining spells). However, anyone who is trying to hear any other sound must make a Wisdom check; otherwise, all he can hear is the sitar. The effects cease when the sitarist stops playing.
XP Value: 1,500.

Spinning wheel of dharma

Thread from this skein can be woven into a garment keyed to an individual. If one dies wearing such a garment, the garment can be rewoven into another that will mystically be the exact size for his reincarnation. (See *Legends & Lore*, page 126.) Various spells and items — *crystal balls*, *reincarnation sight*, *clairvoyance* and so on — can then be used to locate the reincarnation if focused upon the garment. If the garment is then worn

by the individual, he receives all memories of his previous incarnation.
XP Value: 4,000.

Spirit whisk

This brush-like *whisk* can be used to clear an area of unseen spirits. The whisker may brush clean a 10' x 10' area per round. After this occurs, any invisible or intangible creature must move out of the area and cannot move back while the wielder is present. For example, a wielder about to be attacked by an invisible stalker can whisk himself a shelter from that monster, who cannot attack until the wielder moves from the area. Those actively trying to stay are entitled to a saving throw vs. spells. The whisks effect does not work on a creature tied to a specific area, such as a haunt; such a creature will not be able to attack the wielder as long as he holds the *whisk*, however.
XP Value: 2,000.

Tandava drum and tambourine of deva presence

When both of these percussion instruments are played by proficient priests or their disciples, all monsters of up to Semi-Intelligence within hearing must make saving throws vs. spell. Those failing believe that the PCs are guarded by pow-

erful divine creatures and do not attack unless attacked first. Even if attacked, the creatures will seek to flee at the first opportunity. If the playing ceases, the awe effect wears off and the creatures will most likely attack with fervor.
XP Value: 3,500 for both.

Tome of spying

The *Artha Shastra* ("Textbook of Material Matters") is an ancient handbook on counter-espionage against those within one's own ranks, especially spouses and close allies. It describes thousands of ways the owner's confidantes might betray him. If the owner writes on one of its 32 blank central pages the name of someone who claims to be an ally, an *unseen servant* is created. The *servant* follows the person in question until called back, at which time it reports all activity which could be considered traitorous. The servants are as created by the spell, and they can be detected and destroyed in the manners described there. In this manner, the owner can have up to 32 persons at once followed and observed. Once an owner has inscribed a page with a name, that page cannot be rewritten. But when the book changes hands, the pages return to their blank state, and all previously created unseen servants are destroyed. It should



come as no surprise that the *Artha Shastra* has been handed down through the ages through theft and murder.

XP Value 5,000.

Trees, magical

Though not actually magical "items," certain trees are laden with magic powers that can be harnessed. They cannot be "created" but can be carefully grown over time (XP Value: 4,000 each). Several varieties exist:

- **Flame-of-the-woods tree:** This short madder tree has five-bulbed red flowers that shake and glow when the roots can find water. If carefully clipped and wrapped in honey-soaked leaves, these bulbous flowers can be thrown as missiles from the *fire seeds* spell. The flowers remain potent for up to a full day if they are kept damp.

- **Moksha mango tree:** The sweet fruit of this tree may be eaten only by one who believes he has been faithful to his calling and faith; the slightest doubt causes a permanent loss of a point of Wisdom. An ingester without doubt submits himself for summary divine judgement. If the gods agree that the eater has been true through his life, he is killed and given "release" (*moksha*) from reincarnation; this ends his journey. If the gods have reasons for keeping him

incarnate, the character suffers no ill effects. Note that this works both for the pure paladin and the dark Thug.

- **Wool tree:** First reported in India by the Greek traveler Herodotus, the wool tree bears an exceptionally strong type of wool where other trees have fruit or flowers. The wool, which otherwise resembles that of a white sheep, can be spun into cotton cloth with the strength of plate mail. This cotton is especially ripe for enchantment and gives a +1 bonus to all rolls on enchant an item spells cast upon it.

Vajra arrows

These +3 *vajra arrows* turn into *bolts of lightning* when fired. When an arrow strikes a target, it delivers 2d6+3 hp electrical damage and creates a thunderclap which requires the victim and all within 20' to save vs. paralyzation or be stunned for 1d4+1 rounds. The *vajra arrows* are usually found in batches of up to five, and each can be used once regardless of whether it hits the target.

XP Value: 400 each.

Wheel of light rays

This cross with bent spokes (the Sanskrit *su-asti*) can be spun like a pinwheel. When so spun, the wheel emits a blinding kaleidoscopic array of light to a

distance of 30'. Everyone looking at the front of the pinwheel must save vs. spell or be blinded for 4d4 rounds. In addition, each evil creature struck by the light must make another saving throw vs. spell or suffer 1d4 hp damage for each of its points of karma. (For non-Indian—kit characters or monsters, use Level or Hit Dice.) This effect does not harm neutral or good creatures.

XP Value: 2,500.

Wrist threads of spirit protection

The *raksha threads* are worn about the wrists in various rituals, especially in summer. These magical *threads* are wards against evil spirits, acting as a permanent *protection from evil*. In addition, the *threads* allow the wearer to see through the illusions of evil spirits, including the similarly named *rakshasa*. The *wrist threads* cannot be touched by evil spirits or their magic.

XP Value: 750.



Michael Selinker is a game designer who lives in Seattle, Washington. This is the final installment in his trilogy of articles based on an Indian culture.





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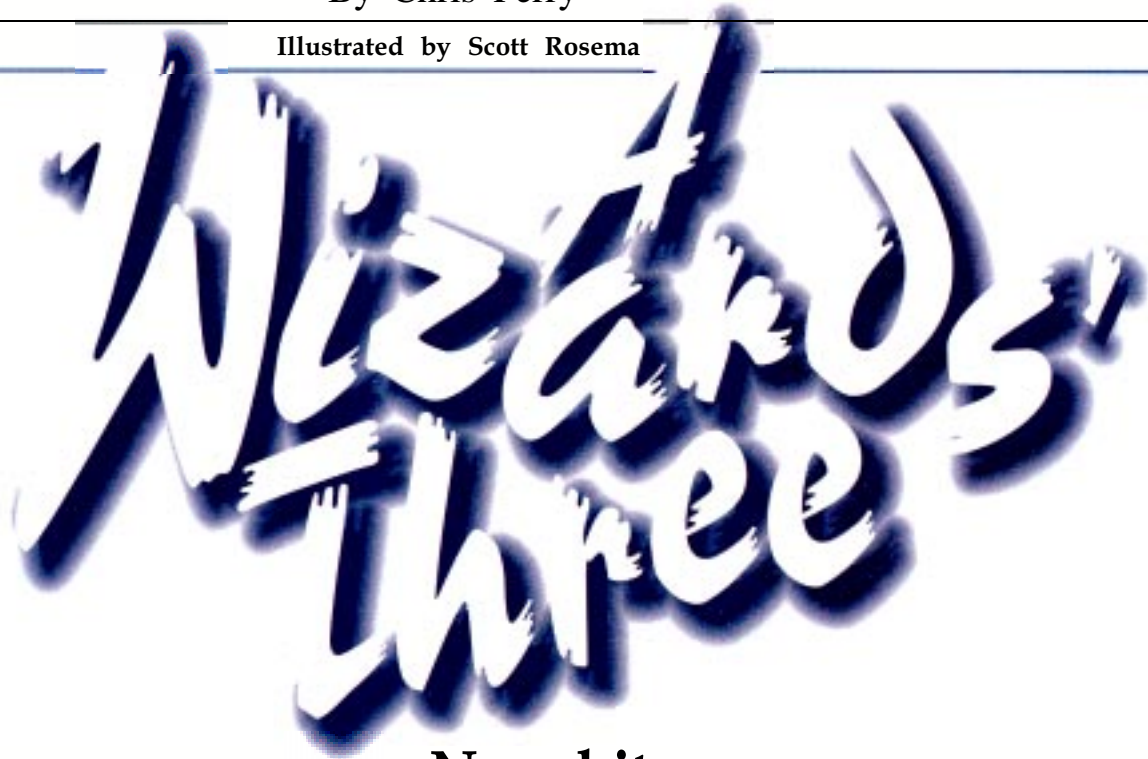
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New kits: Frost Wizards, Fiend Slayers, and Spiritualists

In today's AD&D® game, there are many kits available to wizard PCs. There is still room, however, for a few more kits — a few more choices for those who're bored perhaps jaded with what they have. This article presents the frost wizard, fiend slayer, and spiritualist. The frost wizard bears special mention as it as a sub-class of wizard rather than a kit, so it is handled somewhat differently.

The frost wizard

Description: The frost wizard is a rare kind of elemental mage, one who specializes in a mixture of two schools of elemental magic. In this case, the mixture is air and water, which he uses to create spells of ice, frost, and cold. Since the elemental planes of air and water meet to form the para-elemental plane of ice, many consider frost wizards to be para-elementalists rather than elementalists, but this is more a subject of syntactic debate among sages. What matters to frost wizards is that their brand of magic has a power all its own.

Until recently, ice magic wasn't really a specialty. There were shamans among the Viking-like peoples who possessed some skill with it, but they were few and far between. Now mages calling themselves frost wizards, with skills equal to those of other elementalists, have begun making their way through the northern land.

Their school is rather limited, making frost mages careful about how they operate. It should come as no surprise that the northlands are where the school is strongest.

Requirements: None.

Races Allowed: Elves, half-elves, and humans.

Saving Throw Modifiers: Frost wizards

receive a +2 bonus on saves against cold-based spells, and opponents suffer a -2 penalty on saves against such spells when cast by frost wizards.

Spell Learning: Frost wizards gain a +25% bonus to learn spells of elemental ice, with a +15% bonus to learn spells of elemental air and water. Unlike their more conventional elemental cousins, they suffer no penalty to learn non-elemental magic, but they are expressly forbidden to use spells of elemental earth and fire.

Benefits: Frost wizards can memorize an extra spell per spell level so long as at least one of the spells is of their specialty.

Ice-based spells are reduced by one level with regard to difficulty when researched by frost wizards. Frost wizards above 15th level need not concentrate on summoned ice elementals to control them. The 5% chance of elementals turning upon them remains in effect until they reach 20th level.

Damage from cold-based spells cast by frost wizards is increased by one point/die of damage. Damage to frost wizards from cold-based spells is decreased by 1 hp per die of damage.

Disadvantages: Frost wizards are forbidden to learn spells of elemental earth and fire. Also, since their school of magic has only recently risen from its primitive origins, frost wizards are limited in their choice of cold-based spells (see below for list and new spells). They have the unfortunate distinction of having an even more limited range of spells than necromancers.

Suggested Kits: Anagakok, Amazon Sorceress, Militant Wizard, Savage Wizard, Witch, Wu Jen.

Spells: The frost wizard's specialty, the elemental school of ice, is provided here in full. Some are new, others are already well-known, and the rest are reversals of standard spells.



School of Elemental Cold

1st Level:

Chill (new)

Endure cold (adapted clerical spell)

Freezing hands (reversal/*Burning Hands*)

Ice burst (reversal/*fireburst*, *Tome of Magic*)

Snillloc's snowball (FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures)

2nd Level:

Chill metal (reversal/*heat metal*, adapted clerical spell)

Frost sphere (reversal/*flaming sphere*)

Ice knife (*Complete Wizard's Handbook*)

Resist cold (adapted clerical spell)

Snillloc's snowball swarm (FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures)

Snow tread (new)

3rd Level:

Freeze tire (new)

Frost trap (reversal/*fire trap*)

Ice claws (new)

Icelance (FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures)

4th Level:

Control temperature 10' Radius (adapted clerical spell, can't raise temperature to above 55°F using this spell)

Frost shield (reversal/*chill* form of *fire shield* only)

Ice storm

Wall of ice

5th Level:

Cone of cold

Conjure elemental (no ice needed to summon ice elemental)

6th Level:

Ice Magic (new)

Otiluke's freezing sphere

7th Level:

Ice mephits (new)

8th Level:

Laruin's blinding blizzard (new)

9th Level:

Elemental aura (*Tome of Magic*)

Ice swarm (reversal/*meteor swarm*)

Chill

(Evocation)

1st level:

Range: 30'

Components: V, S

Duration: 2-5 rounds

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Negates

This spell creates an area of intense cold around the target, causing it to shiver regardless of how much clothing or fur is worn. For the duration of the spell, the target moves at half-speed and suffers a -2 penalty on attack and damage rolls provided he fails a saving throw vs. magic. An interesting side-effect of the *chill* spell is that, if it is cast on a target under the effects of a *chill metal* spell, the target suffers a -2 penalty on Armor Class as well. Note that a *resist cold* spell (or any other related protective magic) prevents this from working.

Snow Tread

(Alteration, Enchantment)

2nd level

Range: 10'

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 hour per level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: One creature per level

Saving Throw: None

This rather simple but valuable spell allows those affected to tread through snow without fear of slipping and at their normal movement rate, thus making it possible for the recipients to travel through terrain covered with ice and snow without being bogged down (ignore modifiers for snow when determining the daily movement rate for the party, including the approximate time needed to complete the trip). Another benefit offered by this spell is that it makes it harder for others to follow the party, for it magically brushes snow into the tracks behind them (-3 penalty on top of all other tracking modifiers).

Up to five creatures can be affected by the *snow tread* spell, plus one additional creature per level of the caster over 5th level (a total of 10, maximum). The material component of the spell is the snow or ice that is to be traversed, in which the caster traces the last words of the spell (a sure sign that the spell is in effect is that the traced words are swept away by its magic).

Freezefire

(Alteration)

3rd level

Range: 5' per level

Components: V, S

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Special

Freezefire is an unusual spell that allows the caster to freeze one or more

fires within range, whether natural or magical, into inert blue ice, thus allowing it to be touched or handled without harm. Up to one 5' x 5' sphere of flame (normal or magical) is transformed into blue ice for every four experience levels, and its duration is permanent with regard to normal fire. As for magical fire, it is affected in the following ways: If it hasn't manifested yet (e.g., a *fireball* flying through the air), it stays inert for 3-5 rounds (the aforementioned *fireball* would fall to the ground as a lifeless lump of ice and sulphur); If the magical fire is already in effect (e.g., a *wall of fire*), the spell causes it (or a part of it, if it is too large for the caster to affect completely) to turn to blue ice for the space of 1 round per level of the caster. While frozen, it can be physically touched, even broken, without ruining the spell. Thus, part of a *wall of fire* that has been frozen could be broken down and one could pass through unscathed, while the frozen lump that was a *fireball* could be picked up and thrown a few rounds later for the usual effects. It doesn't affect fire-based spells of 5th level or higher, nor does it prevent a dragon or chimera from breathing flame unless it was cast 1 round previously. In that case, the creature is allowed a saving throw vs. spell to resist its effects, and, if the save is failed, it is unable to breathe flame for 2-3 rounds.

Ice Claws

(Conjuration, Evocation)

3rd level

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round per level

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: The caster

Saving Throw: None

Casting this spell brings into being a disembodied pair of icy, clawed hands, totally under the control of the caster. The caster can attack twice per round with these claws as a fighter half his level, causing 1-3 hp damage each plus an additional 1-4 hp cold damage (those with resistance to cold suffer no additional damage from the cold). They can be used to attack someone up to 30 yards away from the caster, and on a natural roll of 20 the claw(s) have secured a hold on the target, causing automatic claw and cold damage every round thereafter. The material component of this spell is a pair of crystal claws connected to a small brass chain, all of which is worth 5 gp.

Ice Magic
(Alteration, Elemental Ice)
6th level
Range: 120 yds.
Components: V, S
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: Special

Ice magic is a special spell that allows the caster to shape ice and snow, to fortify current ice-based spells, or to control ice-related creatures within the caster's range. The caster must choose how he wishes to use it, with the following effects:

1. To shape ice: The caster can shape existing ice into bridges, ladders, and the like, up to one 10' x 10' square per level. If there is enough ice on the ground, he can choose to create sharp jags of ice with the same damaging effects as the *spike stones* spell, while large ice stalactites on the ceiling could be formed that would cause 1-8 hp damage each (no more than one large ice "stalactite" per three experience levels). The effects last 1 turn per level.

2. To fortify ice and cold spells: The duration of all such spells (such as *wall of ice*) can be doubled, except for those with instantaneous effects. Ice spells that cause damage are deadlier (+1 hp damage per Hit Die of damage). The spell must be cast 3 rounds before the spell to be fortified is cast.

3. To control ice creatures: Beings from the para-elemental plane of ice can be *dominated* by the caster (as the 5th-level wizard spell), one target per round. Once one being fails its save, it serves the caster unquestioningly until he chooses to *dominate* some other such creature. This lasts for 1 round per level.

The material component of this spell is ice, which is required for all castings except when the second option is chosen (some spells to be fortified are instantaneous, so they cannot be cast beforehand).

Summon Ice Mephits
(Conjuration/Summoning)

7th level
Range: 30 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 5 rounds + 1 round per level
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: None

This spell is very similar to the more common *monster summoning* spells, except that it summons 2-7 ice mephits.

These little fiends arrive in 1-2 rounds through a small portal from the Para-elemental plane of ice, ready to wreak havoc upon the summoner's enemies. There's an 80% chance that the mephits come as desired, a 10% chance that an equal number of ice trolls come through instead, and a 10% chance that another ice or arctic-related creature comes through (see below):

Anomaly Table (d10)

1	Cryohydra (1)
2-3	Frost Giant (1-2)
4-7	Ice Toad (2-5)
8	Remorhaz (1)
9-10	Winter Wolf (2-4)

The material component for this spell is a cup of snow or ice (this, as with many other ice-related spells, isn't necessary if the caster is a frost wizard). It should also be noted that wizards casting this spell in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign can choose to summon 2d8 frost sprites instead.

Laruin's Blinding Blizzard
(Alteration, Conjuration/Summoning)
8th level

Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2-6 hours
Casting Time: 2 rounds
Area of Effect: 2-5 mile radius
Saving Throw: None

This variant of the *control weather* spell allows the caster to more reliably bring about chilly, snowy weather, for it summons magical cold through a temporary conduit connected to the elemental plane of ice.

In the first half-hour black and gray clouds begin forming and the temperature drops by 5°F per turn. The winds, meanwhile, start picking up within 3 turns of casting the spell, increasing from a strong breeze in the first hour to a gale by the second hour. Snow begins to fall within 1 turn of the spell's casting, very light at first, but increasing to a blinding fury at the end of the second hour (1' of snow drops to the ground per hour).

Creatures caught within the blizzard's 2-5 mile radius can move at 1/6 their normal rate at best, will have their vision limited to 10' in front of them, and must either have very thick clothing or be impervious to the cold or else suffer a -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls as well as 1-2 hp cold damage per turn (Those with padded armor, hide, and heavy armors with AC values of 4 and below suffer 1-2 hp damage every other turn, but the attack penalties remain). NPC's without adequate protection must make Morale checks before attempting to enter the blizzard's area of effect. The caster, meanwhile, is protected from the blizzard's effects in a 15' radius, his vision unhampered, and can move through the snow at his normal movement rate (these benefits also accrue to his companions, if they're within the 15' radius). The blizzard begins to lessen only during the last half-hour of the spell, and if the conditions were already favorable then the snow continues (lightly) for another 2-3 hours. Lastly, there is a 10% chance per hour that an ice elemental or some other cold creature is encountered (choose from the list of creatures found under the *summon ice mephits* spell, or roll on the Arctic Encounters table). The material component of *Laruin's Minding blizzard* is a ring of silver enclosed around a piece of smoky white quartz.

The fiend slayer

Description: Fiend slayers are wizards who have taken it upon themselves to learn about the lower planes and their denizens; and it is fiend slayers who have chosen to combat them. While many such mages choose this kit out of sense of duty (perhaps getting involved initially due to curiosity), many more become fiend slayers due to personal loss at the hands of tanar'ri, baatezu, or other fiends, and are not about to let it happen again.

Preferred/Barred Schools: This kit is best suited for conjurers, but all wizards

New Proficiency

Lower Plane Knowledge

(2 slots, Intelligence, -2) This proficiency gives the character some knowledge about a particular lower plane — who lives there, what's needed to survive or get there, etc. The character doesn't have automatic knowledge of spell keys, but he does have some knowledge of what kinds of magic may be affected (proficiency check required).




Note that if the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book is being used, this skill costs 4 slots and starts at a base score of 7.

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are eligible to take this kit.

Ability Score Requirements: A minimum of 16 in Intelligence or Wisdom.

Secondary Skills: None.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any weapons normally allowed to wizards.

Non-Weapon Proficiencies: Bonus: Lower plane knowledge (new). *Required:* Ancient/modern languages (choose one that would aid in researching extraplanar matters), reading/writing. *Recommended:* Ancient history.

Equipment: Fiend slayers start out as any other wizard, but they are required to purchase an extra spellbook (about 200 gp value), most of which is set aside for writing down what they learn about the planes and planar creatures they specialize in. Holy water and silvered weapons are also useful.

Special Benefits: Major/Minor Studies: At the beginning of their careers, fiend slayers must choose to concentrate their studies on one plane in particular: the Abyss, Baatezu, Gehenna, etc. By doing so, they gain certain bonuses with regard to that particular plane or its inhabitants. They receive a +2 on netherworld knowledge checks when seeking knowledge about that plane. Fiend slayers also have an easier time learning how to cast magic properly there (if the PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting is used, fiend slayers know two random spell keys of their choice at the start, and are allowed one Intelligence check to learn another spell key for every two experience levels attained beyond 1st level). At 11th level, a fiend slayer is considered an expert on subjects related to his major plane (equal to a sage). He may choose another plane of existence to specialize in at 15th level.

Fiend Detection: This ability is equal to the *extra-dimensional detection* spell found in the *Tome of Magic* (as per the 3rd-level priest spell). This ability can be used once a day for every two levels of experience and is double-range when the fiend slayer is attempting to detect the type of creature he gets a bonus with (see below).

Creature Bonus: Because of their expertise, fiend slayers gain certain bonuses when dealing with a specific race. This is often a race that the wizard holds a grudge against, and one which must be native to or common on the plane the mage has majored in. In combat with this chosen creature, the fiend slayer receives a +1 bonus on all saving throws against attacks made by the race, and the magic resistance of such

creatures is lowered by 10% in magical attacks made by the fiend slayer (including *summonings*, *charming* attempts, or other castings that the creature would view in as hostile). Creature types include baatezu, gehreleth, mephit, tanar'ri, etc. At 9th level, fiend slayers receive a +2 bonus (total) on saves when attacked by the creatures in question (penalties to fiends remain unchanged).

Special Hindrances: Fiend slayers suffer from the great expense of their researches, even as compared to other magical studies. Reference materials are hard to come by, so they must either pay through the nose (at a 200% mark-up) or spend double the time compiling this knowledge. In addition, fiend slayers are required to slay at least one specimen of their chosen enemy in order to advance each level beyond 7th level (number of Hit Dice equal to the wizard's level). This must be done each time the fiend slayer receives enough experience points to advance to another level.

Races Allowed: Any race that has wizards.

The Spiritualist

Role: The spiritualist is a wizard who has been gifted with the ability to sense unseen spirits and to communicate with them. Most are born with this ability choose to become psionics or priests, but the spiritualist finds that it helps the cause of wizardry equally well, particularly that of necromancy.

Spiritualist know that something more exists beyond their own existence. They believe that that some form of order exists in the netherworld, regardless of the culture they come from. As such, only Lawful or Neutral characters may take this kit.

Preferred/Barred Schools: Necromancers are most likely to be spiritualists, and they make excellent ones. None are barred, except for enchanters, illusionists, and transmuters.

Ability Score Requirements: 16 Wisdom.

Secondary Skills: None.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: **Bonus:** Religion. *Required:* Ancient history, reading/writing, spellcraft.

Equipment: Same as other wizards.

Special Benefits: *Spirit Sense:* Spiritualists have the ability to sense and see spirits within 15 yards. As the spirit comes closer, the surroundings dim in the wiz-

ard's sight, and the spirit glows (if sight is blocked by walls and such, the objects dim even further and a faint glow can be seen upon the obstructing object). If the DM uses *The Complete Psionicist's Handbook*, it can be treated as a "wild talent," replete with psionic points and such. If not, this ability can be used once each day for each three experience levels of the wizard, each use lasting 1 turn per level.

Invisibility to undead: Once a day, spiritualists can render themselves *invisible to undead* (as per the cleric spell), lasting 1 round per level.

Speak with dead: Beginning at the 3rd level, spiritualists gain the ability to *speak with the dead* three times a day. No material components are needed, and the dead spirit can be communicated with even if the skull lacks a lower jaw. (No bones are needed, if noncorporeal undead are the target of this spell).

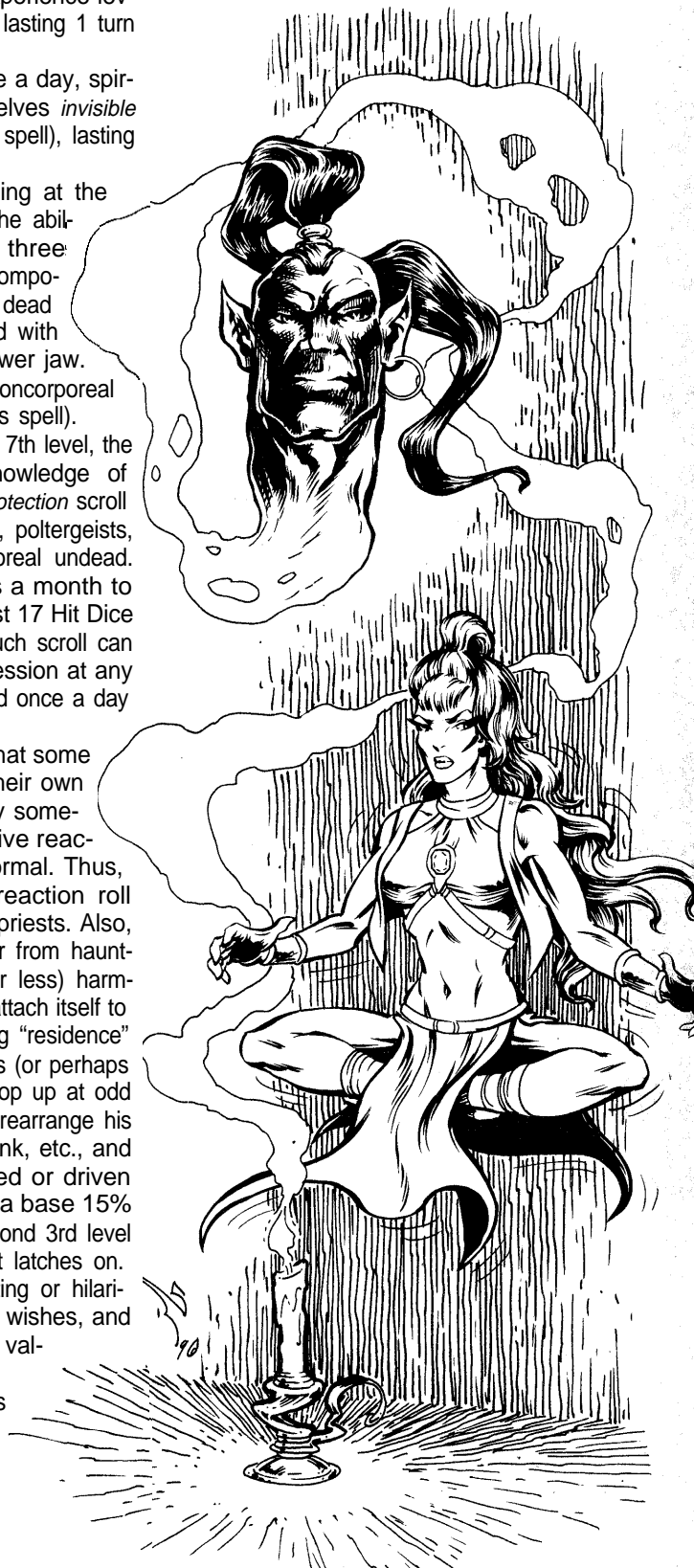
Protection from spirits: At 7th level, the spiritualist has enough knowledge of spirits that he can pen a *protection* scroll that protects against ghosts, poltergeists, wraiths, and other noncorporeal undead. It costs 750 gp and takes a month to write, and it protects against 17 Hit Dice worth of spirits. Only one such scroll can be in the spiritualists possession at any time, and it can only be used once a day

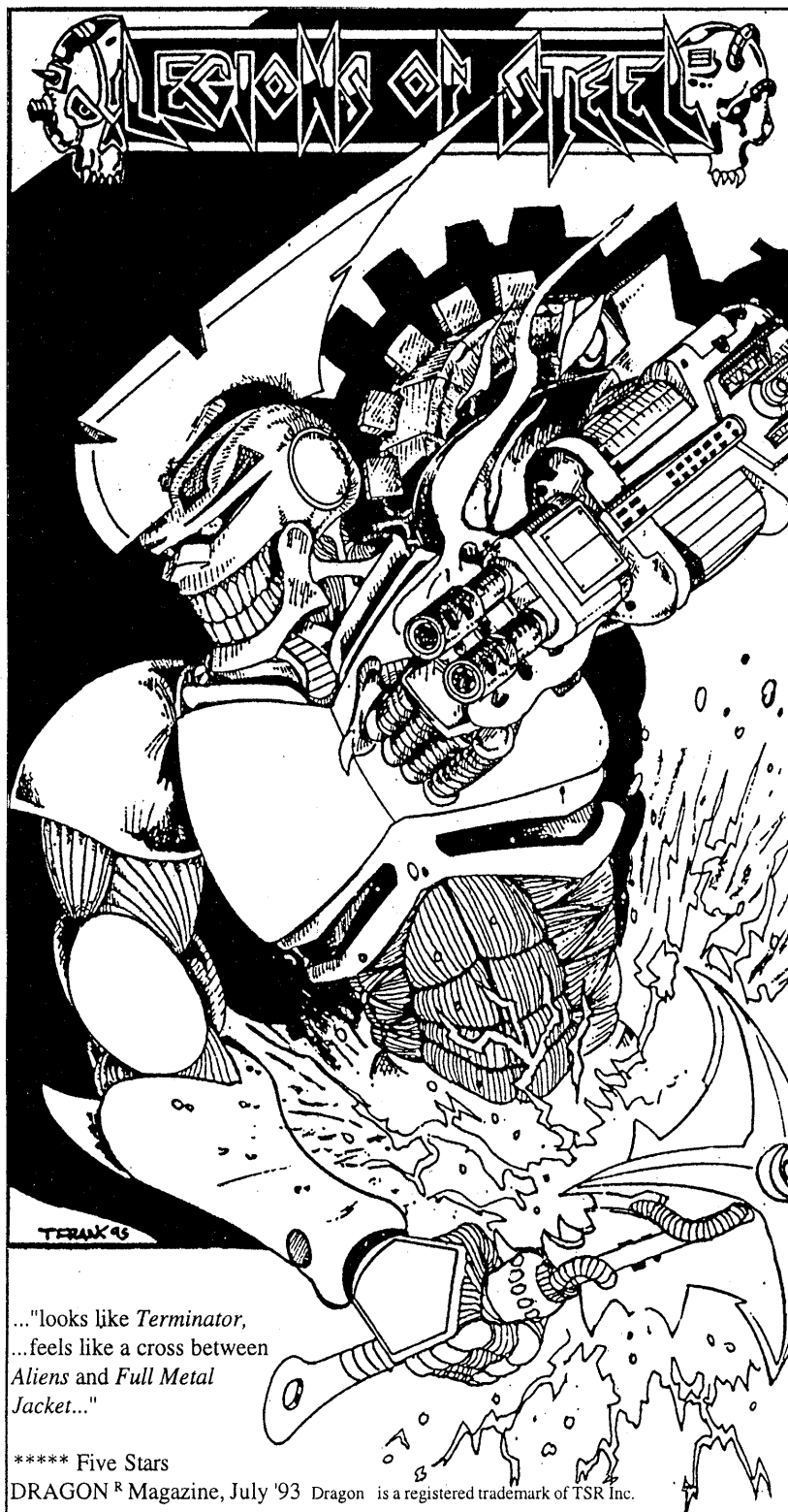
Special Hindrances:

Spiritualists have abilities that some priests feel overlaps into their own province, and as such they sometimes receive more negative reactions from them than is normal. Thus, they suffer an initial -2 reaction roll penalty when dealing with priests. Also, spiritualists sometimes suffer from hauntings, whereupon a (more or less) harmless lesser spirit decides to attach itself to the wizard, most likely taking "residence" in some object he possesses (or perhaps his home). The spirit may pop up at odd hours to talk to the wizard, rearrange his spell components as a prank, etc., and stays unless it is destroyed or driven away by a priest. There's a base 15% chance per level gained beyond 3rd level (non-cumulative) that a spirit latches on. This can be very disconcerting or hilarious, according to the DM's wishes, and such spirits could become valued NPCs to interact with).

Races Allowed: Humans and half-elves.

Chris Perry is pursuing a political science degree. He lives in Northern California on a small orchard farm with 12 cats. This is his fourth article in the pages of DRAGON® Magazine.





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THACO: 11 (10 w/ Str. bonus)
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ALIGNMENT: NG
SPECIAL ATTACKS: 3/2 rnds
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE: immune to woodland creature *charm* spells, +2 to saves vs. fire/electrical (Druid); +4 magical defense (Wis.)

Special Abilities/Bonuses: +1 to hit, +3 dmg (Str.); *shape-change* 3 x/day (Druid).

Weapon proficiencies: Club, sickle, dart, spear, scimitar, sling, staff.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Musical instrument (recorder), riding (horses), swimming, healing, animal lore, read/write common, read/write elvish, tracking.

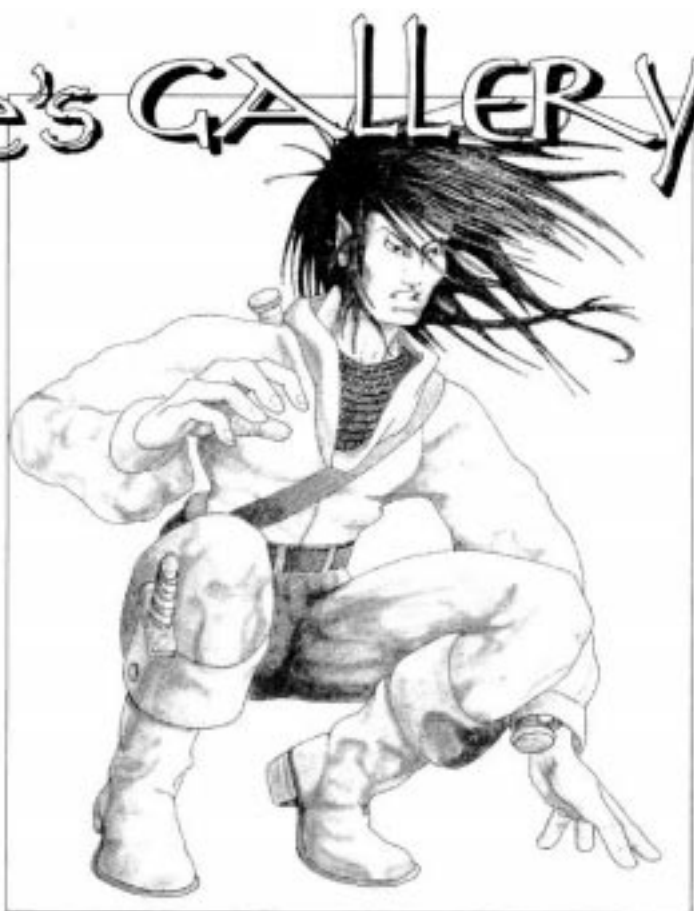
Languages: Common, elf, dwarf, druid, gnoll, centaur, green dragon, nixie, pixie, sprite, treant.

Spells per day: 6, 6, 4, 4, 2.

Magical items: *Scimitar +5 defender, dagger +1 flametongue, elven chain mail +3, shield +1, ring of free action, ring of warmth, dust of disappearance (4 packets), boots of elvenkind, pouch of accessibility, amulet of the planes.*

Equipment: Tylk keeps his elven chain mail hidden under a loose blouse with long sleeves and a pair of baggy trousers. He doesn't care if people notice his armor, but he doesn't want the metal glinting in the sun and making him visible from a distance outdoors. He also carries a sling and a pouch of 20 bullets in his *pouch of accessibility*, along with several darts. He keeps three normal daggers strategically placed behind his neck, behind his right thigh, and in his right boot. He carries his magical dagger strapped to his left wrist. He almost always has a small supply of *goodberries* (from the 2nd-level priest spell) with him, and he is never without his apple wood recorder. He usually carries about 2,000 gp worth of assorted coins, gems, and jewelry.

When traveling on the Prime Material Plane, Tylk is usually accompanied by an adult cooshee (elven dog) named Sir Gawain, and he rides a bay light war horse named Parzifal.



Appearance: Tylk is a 39-year-old half elf who stands 5' 7" tall and weighs 151 pounds. He is very muscular and even stronger than he looks. Tylk has a strong, square chin, high cheekbones, and almond-shaped, green eyes. His shoulder length hair is silver blond and wavy. His locks usually cover his pointed ears, but that does nothing to conceal his elven heritage.

Background: Tylk was born and raised on his wealthy human father's farm. When Tylk was still a child, his mother grew tired of being married to a human and slipped away one night. Though the family servants took care of him, he was not a happy child. As soon as he was old enough to play with the children on the neighboring farms, he learned he was different. Worse, he was slow to mature because he was a half-elf, and he was always a little slower, a little weaker, and a little less clever than human children his age. Even his father tended to be impatient with him, because he didn't understand that Tylk needed a little extra time to develop.

When Tylk was an adolescent, he did a favor for a crusty old ranger who took a liking to the troubled youth. The man became Tylk's friend and mentor, teaching him the rudiments of combat, outdoor skills, and priestly magic. Tylk also learned not to be ashamed of his race and not to allow himself or anyone else to be mistreated.

Role-playing Notes: Tylk remembers the lessons of his childhood well. He is race-blind, seeing every person as a unique individual. He is not easily fooled or bluffed, and he can never be bullied. Though he's not exactly claustrophobic, he dislikes enclosed places. (He once spent the better part of a day locked in a trunk as the result of a prank). Tylk prefers the open sky to a roof over his head. He respects authority, but only when it acts responsibly and sensibly. Tylk tends to treat everyone he meets as an equal.

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THE ARCAINE CHALLENGE

Friday, May 31 is going to be here sooner than you think. That's the last day **you can call the** ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® TRIVIATHLON™: The Arcane Challenge Clue Line for assistance in correctly answering the 100 trivia questions in TSR's biggest contest ever. Then you've got just two more weeks to get your answers to TSR.

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by Jeanine N. Mielecki

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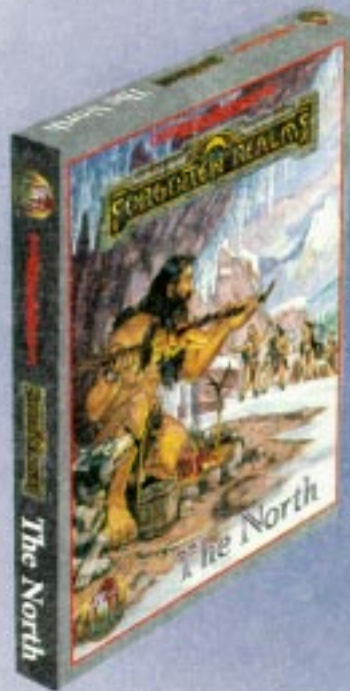
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By Barry A. A. Dillinger

Illustrated by Fred Fields

The DIMENSIONAL Wizard

Bringing a new dimension to your mage

The dimensional wizard has been around for quite some time but is only now beginning to surface, much like that of the elemental wizard (see the *Tome of Magic* for information on the elementalists). These specialist wizards, like the elementalists, are not predisposed to accepting the magical classification system of schools (necromancy, alteration, invocation/evocation, etc.) and favor a more natural understanding of magic. The result is dimensionalism.

Dimensionalism is not a school but an area of specialization focusing on extraplanar spells. Dimensionalists (as wizards of this specialization are known) adhere strictly to the teachings of this branch of magic and are apt to be very serious in their philosophy and attitude.

History of dimensionalism

Dimensionalists follow the teachings of a rather aloof half-elf mage named Deverick Abraxas, who founded the ideals upon which dimensionalism is based. It is for this reason that some fanatically devoted followers often refer to themselves as "Abraxites."

Abraxas was an extremely open-minded individual and accepted students of varying races, including humans, half-elves, elves, and gnomes. The mage was especially attuned to the demi-plane of shadow, and this eventually led to his studies in the field of dimensionalism.

Strictures of the dimensionalist

When an individual makes the decision to become a dimensionalist, he is bound by certain restrictions. The individual must be a human, half-elf, elf, or gnome and must have a minimum Wisdom of 16

and an Intelligence of at least 9 to be considered for this branch of magic.

Dimensionalist spells

Dimensionalist spells may be chosen from any of the nine schools of magic: abjuration, alteration, conjuration/summoning, enchantment/charm, greater divination, illusion, invocation/evocation, lesser divination, and necromancy. The shadow *form* spell, for example, belongs to the necromancy school; but, according to the dimensionalist, it is also a spell of the negative material plane. Like the elementalist, the dimensionalist may learn and cast spells of any school, although he is not bound by the restrictions regarding opposition schools. Dimensionalism has no opposition. Furthermore, dimensionalists suffer considerable penalties when learning and casting spells that do not relate directly to extraplanar magic. The dimensionalist has a -25% chance to learn spells outside the list of extraplanar magic. Exceptions are spells for the school of lesser divination, which all wizards may learn without restriction.

Although the dimensionalist repertoire is small, they are potent wizards, for they gain the following advantages when utilizing extraplanar magic:

- When applicable, an enemy of the dimensionalist suffers a -2 penalty to his saving throw vs. extraplanar magic.
- When extraplanar magic is employed against the dimensionalist, he saves at a +2 against these spells.
- Dimensionalists have a +30% chance to learn spells listed as extraplanar magic (see the following list of dimensional spells).
 - One extra dimensionalist spell is granted at each spell level.



- Once daily, the dimensionalist may cast one extraplanar spell as if he was 1d6 levels higher.
- At 17th level, the dimensionalist may cast a *maze* spell once per day.
- At 18th level, the dimensionalist may cast a *contact other plane* spell twice per day.
- At 20th level, the dimensionalist may cast a gate spell thrice per day.

Dimensional spells available

The following list of spells covers the *Player's Handbook*, *Tome of Magic*, *Complete Wizard's Handbook*, *Drow of the Underdark*, *Unearthed Arcana*, and *DRAGON® Magazine* (issues #167 and #187).

Player's Handbook

- 2nd-level spells: *deep pockets*, *detect invisibility*, *rope trick*
 3rd-level spells: *blink*, *wraithform*
 4th-level spells: *dimension door*, *minor creation*, *shadow monsters*
 5th-level spells: *conjure elemental*, *contact other plane*, *demi-shadow monsters*, *dismissal*, *Leomund's secret chest*, *major creation*, *shadow magic*, *summon shadow*
 6th-level spells: *demi-shadow magic*, *ensnarement*, *invisible stalker*, *move earth*, *shades*, *true seeing*
 7th-level spells: *banishment*, *Drawmij's instant summons*, *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*, *Mordenkainen's sword*, *shadow walk*, *teleport without error*, *vanish*
 8th-level spells: *binding*, *demand*, *maze*, *trap the soul*
 9th-level spells: *astral spell*, *energy drain*, *gate*

Tome of Magic

- 5th-level spells: *Khazid's procurement*
 6th-level spells: *Lorloveim's shadowy transformation*
 9th-level spells: *estate transference*

Complete Wizard's Handbook

- 8th-level spells: *shadow form*

Drow of the Underdark

- 9th-level spell: *black blade of disaster*

Unearthed Arcana

- 5th-level spells: *dolor*
 7th-level spells: *torment truename*

DRAGON Magazine (#167 and #187)

- 1st-level spells: *liquid orb*
 2nd-level spells: *shark bolt*, *stone sleep*

- 3rd-level spells: *skulltrap*, *searing serpent*, *steam blast*
 5th-level spells: *stone drill*
 7th-level spells: *flame chase*, *wings*
 8th-level spells: *airball*, *deep delve*
 9th-level spells: *power word: liquefy*, *wind war*

When a dimensionalist attempts to create a new spell relating to extraplanar magic, the DM should count the new spell as one level lower (for determining difficulty). In addition, DMs should consult the PLANESCAPE™ campaign setting or *Manual of the Planes* for complete information on extraplanar worlds and familiarize themselves with the effects of magic on those specific planes.

New dimensionalist spells

Mask light

(Abjuration, Illusion/Phantasm)
 Level: 4
 Range: 1 yd per level
 Components: V, S, M
 Duration: 1 hour per level
 Casting Time: 1 turn
 Area of Effect: 40' cube
 Saving Throw: None

By means of this spell, the wizard provides the ideal environment for encampments by masking from passers-by the light of the campfire. When the caster invokes this spell, he causes an extra-dimensional rift to open and temporarily cover the area of effect. Throughout the duration of the spell, the party exists simultaneously on the Prime Material and the border ethereal planes. The light of the campfire is also affected, and passing travelers are totally oblivious to the party's location because no illumination is emitted into the Prime Material plane.

Although the party members and the light source are invisible to beings of the Prime Material plane, those affected by the spell have the ability to see out of the border ethereal and clearly into the Prime Material. There is no chance of attack by prowling ethereal creatures due to the simultaneous existence of the spell recipients. Prime Material beings using *true seeing*, *detect invisibility*, or other similar spells, will see the masked individuals and their campfire, albeit as though through a hazy, translucent shade.

The material component of this spell is a small, black cloth.

Ethereal walk

(Alteration)
 Level: 7
 Range: Touch
 Components: V, S
 Duration: 6 turns per level
 Casting Time: 1
 Area of Effect: Special
 Saving Throw: Negates

By use of this spell, the wizard and any creature(s) he touches are transported immediately to the border ethereal plane. In this region, the wizard can see into the Prime Material plane and may then travel along the border to reach a desired location on the Prime Material. While in the border ethereal, the wizard may also enter into adjoining planes as well, including the ethereal (deep), the four known demi-planes, the inner planes (elemental, para- and quasi-elemental), alternate ethereal and alternate Prime Material planes. Remaining in the border ethereal also keeps the wizard safe from ether cyclones (see *Manual of the Planes* or the PLANESCAPE setting for details).

Any creatures touched by the wizard when this spell is cast also make the transition to the border ethereal plane. They may opt to follow the wizard, wander off into the border ethereal, or stumble back into the Prime Material plane (50% chance for either result if they are lost or abandoned by the wizard). Creatures that are unwilling to accompany the wizard into the border ethereal receive a saving throw, negating the effect if successful.

Dimensional schools

As future generations of dimensionalists appear, there may come the time when sub-specialties develop within the class, owing to the birth of etherealists, astralists, para-elementalists, quasi-elementalists, and demi-planists, as well as others. Opposition schools may then crop up, but only time will tell.

Players and DMs are encouraged to come up with new ways to explore extraplanar magic and its patron-mage, the dimensionalist.



Barry A.A. Dillinger is a horror novelist from Pennsylvania. His book, When Booklore Ends, will be out this summer from North west Publishing.

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Campaign Classics

ORIENTAL ADVENTURES

by David “Zeb” Cook

illustrated by Jim Holloway

Mordrose, wizard for hire, sneered. He was having a good day — a very good day. Terrorizing townsfolk was fun, made more fun because he was being paid for it, and rendered truly enjoyable since he smeared their four best champions all over the street. So when the old man with the long wispy beard and caterpillar-thick eyebrows hobbled into the street and announced his challenge, Mordrose couldn't possibly imagine a fight worth even one spell.

“Prepare to d—”

The old man was gone. One second he was there, the next not.

“Over here, dishonorable one,” cackled a voice behind him. Mordrose turned just in time to see the old man, capering gleefully on the rooftop, launch a fiery mass of flame straight at his chin.

One of my favorite pieces of ancient history is *Oriental Adventures*, the first rulebook I wrote for the AD&D® game back before there was a “2nd Edition” attached to the name. It presented the game with a uniquely Eastern point of view, trying to capture the sometimes elusive feel of Oriental fantasy. It included new races, character classes, equipment, spells, and magical items, along with the first appearances of many things that later made it into the 2nd Edition rules.

Alas, time and the 2nd Edition rulebook have passed that work by. Much

Wu-jen: the Oriental mage revisited

of the material in *Oriental Adventures* has been made obsolete or so modified by the 2nd Edition that it is hardly worth the effort of most players to make the changes needed to play in that setting today. Now, this could be mourned as a terrible loss or a big inconvenience; I prefer to see it as a golden, shining opportunity. It's time to introduce a wu jen for the nineties.

A woo what?

Wu jen are lone wizards of awesome physical ability, strange habits, and mystical power. Wu jen were the *Oriental Adventures* equivalent of the standard mage, men of mysterious power who often lived as hermits and who terrified sensible folk by their mere presence. (For those who want to know, wu jen were originally a mix of Taoist hermits, Chinese sages, and the mountain hermits of Japan, among others.) The original wu jen as described in *Oriental Adventures* was little more than a specialist wizard with a few special powers (*ki*) and some amusing restrictions. Since that time, specialist wizards have cropped up all over the place, and the world has gotten more exposure to the inspired hyper-activity of Asian fantasy films. It's definitely time for the wu jen to change.

Thus, wu jen are now wizards with a difference: wu jen are mages of physical action. Wu jen are not mages who clutch puny daggers and cower behind fighters. Wu jen are men of physical strength, weapon prowess, and mystical skill. Wu jen magic is hard and physically demanding. It's power comes from both arcane ritual and the caster's own strength.

Wu jen characters are available to any race also open to mages. (If your DM is trying to run an Oriental-styled campaign, check to see which races are allowed first.) Wu jen must have an Intelligence of at least 9 and a Constitution of at least 12. Characters with a 16 or greater Intelligence gain a 10% bonus on all experience earned. (A high Constitution is its own reward, as shall be seen.) Wu jen can be of any alignment. Their abilities cannot be combined with kits or multi-classed. Wu jen use the same experience tables as wizards. Wu jen start at first level with 2-5 hit points; thereafter they gain 1d6 hit points per level.

Unlike wizards, wu jen are not limited in their choice of weapons. They can use any weapon available, although they still use the wizard THAC0 progression. Like wizards, wu jen cannot wear any armor or use shields. They can use magical items available to wizards or warriors except, of course, magical armor.

All wu jen are automatically followers of a school. This does not mean every wu jen has an academy where the character trains, although some do this. A wu jen's school is the collected wisdom of a great sage or immortal whom he has chosen to follow. Such schools are

Wu-jen spells allowed by school

Earth

1st Level

Detect magic
Grease
Hold portal
Mending
Read magic
Spider climb

2nd Level

Bind
Fools gold
Glitterdust
Locate object
Magic mouth
Shatter
Wizard lock

3rd Level

Melf's minute meteors

4th Level

Dig
Elemental turning
Stoneskin

5th Level

Conjure elemental
Distance distortion
Fabricate
Passwall
Stone shape
Transmute rock to mud
Wall of iron
Wall of stone

6th Level

Disintegrate
Glasse
Move earth
Stone to flesh
Transmute water to dust

7th Level

Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion
Statue

8th Level

Glassteel
Sink

9th Level

Crystalbrittle
Imprisonment
Meteor swarm

Air

1st Level

Dancing lights
Detect magic
Feather fall
Message
Read magic
Tenser's floating disc
Wall of fog

2nd Level

Blur
Fog cloud
Stinking cloud
Whispering wind

3rd Level

Fly
Gust of wind
Wind wall

4th Level

Elemental turning
Solid fog

5th Level

Airy water
Cloudkill
Conjure elemental

6th Level

Control weather
Death fog

8th Level

Incendiary cloud

Fire

1st Level

Affect normal fires
Burning hands
Detect magic
Light
Read magic

2nd Level

Continual light
Flaming sphere
Pyrotechnics

3rd Level

Fireball
Flame arrow

4th Level

Elemental turning
Fire charm
Fire shield

Fire trap

Wall of fire

5th Level

Conjure elemental

6th Level

Fire breath

7th Level

Delayed blast fireball

8th Level

Incendiary cloud

9th Level

Internal fires

Water

1st Level

Chill touch
Detect magic
Wall of fog
Read magic

2nd Level

Fog cloud
Melf's acid arrow

3rd Level

Water breathing

4th Level

Elemental turning
Ice storm
Wall of ice

5th Level

Airy water
Cone of cold
Conjure elemental
Transmute rock to mud

6th Level

Death fog
Lower water
Otiluke's freezing sphere
Part Water
Transmute water to dust

9th Level

Tsunami

Nature

1st Level

Change self
Charm person

Detect magic
Detect undead
Enlarge
Hypnosis

2nd Level

Alter self
Detect evil
Detect invisibility
Scare

3rd Level

Clairaudience
Clairvoyance
Feign death
Vampiric touch
Wraithform

4th Level

Detect scrying
Polymorph self
Shout
Stoneskin

5th Level

Contact other plane
Domination
Sending
Telekinesis
Teleport

6th Level

Legend lore
Mass suggestion
Project image
Tenser's transformation
True seeing

7th Level

Duo-dimension
Power word, stun
Statue
vision

8th Level

Demand
Mass charm
Power word, blind
Serten's spell immunity

9th Level

Energy drain
Foresight
Power word, kill
Shape change

typically handed down in books containing work of the founding great master, along with all the commentary, debate, and expansion done by later students of that great master. (A proper wu jen is always a “student of the great master,” even if the master died 700 years ago. Only when others come to seek him out does a wu jen ever hope to become a great master himself. In any case, it is bad form for a wu jen to announce himself as a great master.)

There are five common schools that match the five elements — earth, air, fire, water, and nature. The spells of each school are listed on Table 1. In addition, the DM can create other schools that suit his campaign.

Unlike specialist wizards, a wu jen can learn only spells of his school; All other schools are strictly off-limits to the character. Furthermore, his working selection is very limited. A wu jen does not learn a massive number of spells which he keeps in a massive tome. Instead, a wu jen can only learn one spell per level regardless of his Intelligence. This spell can be of any level the character can cast.

All this may sound odd, but it is the casting of spells where wu jen truly differ. First off, wu jen do not memorize spells to cast them. They do not spend their mornings poring over spellbooks to prepare for the day's adventure. Indeed, a wu jen has no need for a spellbook. He has already studied the writings and from that and his own mental skill has learned how to invoke the power held within the spell's components.

Instead, a wu jen can cast any spell he knows at any time he wishes — provided he can pay the cost. For a wu jen, casting a spell is to tap into his own physical power and release the energy from within. In game terms, a wu jen suffers damage every time he casts a spell. The amount of damage suffered is triple the level of the spell. Casting a *magic missile* costs the character 3 hp, a wu jen casting a *fireball* loses 9 hp. These hit points lost are treated as normal damage. A wu jen can never cast a spell requiring more hit points than he has available at the instant the spell is cast. Tsao (with 4 hp) plans to cast *magic missile* (at a cost of 3 hp) but loses the initiative and is struck by an arrow for 3 hp damage. He only has 1 hp remaining — less than the *magic missile* requires — so the spell is impossible. A wu jen can deliberately cast a spell that reduces his hit points to exactly zero. In this case he

falls comatose and the optional rules allowing survival into negative hit points are used.

Because of the intense physical power a wu jen must store and tap from within himself, the benefits a wu jen receives from magical healing are halved (rounding up). A *cure light wounds* that would heal 7 hp for another character only heals 4 hp for a wu jen. Normal healing for a wu jen character is unaffected.

As with the old wu jen of *Oriental Adventures*, the new wu jen must also abide by a number of personal taboos. The magic drawn from within the character can be tapped only if certain seemingly trivial rituals and restrictions are observed by the character. These serve to protect the character's inner energy from contamination. At first level the character must observe one practice; thereafter he must add another at every level divisible by five. Failure to observe these practices results in a loss of spell-casting ability for 2d4 days.

There is no set list of restrictions and players and DMs are encouraged to create their own. The restrictions should be minor, features to enhance the personality of the character and not detracts to the enjoyment of play. Restrictions should also relate to the purity or cleansing of the body. Suggested observances include such as the character:

- is a strict vegetarian
- Cannot touch a dead body
- cannot touch a member of the opposite sex
- Cannot drink alcohol
- must bathe frequently (at least every other day)
- cannot bathe
- cannot wear shoes
- cannot sit facing a certain direction

As part of their mastery over the power of the self, wu jen develop over time a number of physical abilities of fantastic proportion. All wu jen are able to enter into a yogic trance. This trance is as restful and refreshing as sleep; however, the wu jen suffers no penalties to his awareness of immediate surroundings. Thus a wu jen can sense if something enters the room or camp where he is meditating and can immediately react as if he had been awake all that time. Meditating wu jen are never groggy or disoriented, nor do they sleep through events unless they choose to.

At 6th level, wu jen are able to enhance any one physical attribute (Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution) by

1d4 points for 2d4 rounds. This requires intense effort and concentration on the part of the wu jen, costing 1d6+2 hit points whenever the power is used regardless of the amount of increase or duration. The character can choose the attribute affected but has no control over amount or duration. Abilities cannot be increased beyond the character's racial limits, but the Exceptional Strength rating for fighters is used. Any adjustments are applied immediately but are not retroactive. Increasing Constitution does not gain additional hit points. Characters can use this ability multiple times, summoning up the power once per round. Thus a wu jen could increase his Strength several times over or raise his Strength and Dexterity near simultaneously if he wants to spend the hit points.

Upon attaining 10th level, a wu jen attracts 1d4 pupils, all 1st-level wu jen, who come to study his teachings. The pupils are generally faithful unless ill-treated or severely tempted (such as by a superior master). With each level they gain, there is a 5% cumulative chance of leaving to pursue their own studies. Those who leave are quickly replaced by new 1st-level pupils (unless they left due to mistreatment). Wu jen do not automatically build strongholds or attract fighting men, although they can do these things should they so choose.

At 12th level, the wu jen can leap and spring to up to 30' in any direction, again by summoning up his physical reserves. Each leap costs the character one hit point, even if only a portion of the distance is traveled. Furthermore, the wu jen can perform a series of such leaps within a single round, up the limit of his normal movement.

New wu-jen spells

The following spells are adapted from the *Oriental Adventures* rulebook, updated for use with the new wu jen.

Elemental turning

(Earth school)

Level: 4

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 4 +1d4 rounds

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 60' radius

Saving Throw: Negates

Elemental turning creates a powerful ward against creatures from the various Elemental Planes. Upon casting, the

spell-caster must name the plane ward-
ed against (fire, water, lightning, ooze,
etc.). All elemental creatures of that
plane must immediately make a saving
throw vs. spell if they are within the area
of effect. Those who fail must immedi-
ately flee the area of effect by the most
direct route. Such creatures cannot reen-
ter the area for the duration of the spell.
Elemental creatures outside the area of
effect must save vs. spell before they
can enter; those who fail are kept out-
side the area.

The spell centers on the caster and
moves with him. If an elemental crea-
ture is forced to enter or remain within
the spell's effect against its will, the
magic's power of it is automatically bro-
ken and it may act freely. The spell does
not break the concentration of a mage
controlling an elemental; it affects only
the creature's behavior.

The component for this spell is a
small bottle holding a sample of the ele-
ment being affected.

Fire Breath

(Fire school)

Level: 6

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 30' cone, 15-wide base

Saving Throw: Halves

The spell allows the wu jen to exhale
a blast of scorching fire similar to a red
dragon's breath. All within the area of
effect must save vs. breath weapon or
suffer 1d6 hp damage per level of the
caster. Those who save successfully
reduce the damage suffered to half. As
with dragon's breath, the flames ignite
combustible material in the area of effect.

The material component for this spell
is a cinder clenched in the teeth of the
caster.

Internal fires

(Fire school)

Level: 6

Range: 60'

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 9

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

Internal fires is a fearsome spell that

conjures raging flames from within the
bowels of its victims. The spell affects
one or more creatures whose total lev-
els or hit dice are no greater than the
caster. All targets must be within 20' of
a single point and within range of the
caster. Within these limits, the spell
leaps from target to target as chosen by
the caster. The hit dice or levels of the
victim are subtracted from the spell's
total strength and if no hit die (or levels)
remain, the victim instantly erupts in all-
consuming flames. Death is instantane-
ous. Magical items or spells that con-
fer any sort of protection from fire auto-
matically negate the effect for the pro-
tected individual only.

The material component for this spell
is an iron brazier filled with hot coals.

Tsunami

(Water school)

Level: 6

Range: 1 mile

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 2 turns

Casting Time: 1 turn

Area of Effect: Wave 10 yds. long x 5'
high per level

Saving Throw: Halves

This spell, which can only be cast
upon large bodies of water such as seas
or oceans, summons up a enormous
roiling wave of water, a *tsunami*. Upon
casting the spell, the sea begins to rock
and churn as if heaving in its bed. After
two turns, an enormous wave boils forth
to the maximum height of the caster's
ability. This wave moves in a straight
line in the direction chosen by the cast-
er. It travels 500' per round and each
round drops by 10' in height at sea or
20' upon striking dry land. Vessels and
wooden buildings caught in the wave
have a percentage chance to be
destroyed equal to the current height of
the wave, while stone buildings have
only one quarter this percentage. Land
and air dwelling creatures caught in the
wave suffer damage equal to 1d10 per
10' of height. A saving throw vs. breath
weapon reduces this damage by half.

The material component for this spell
is the scale of a dragon turtle and a drop
of water.

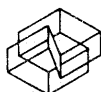
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The Perfect Princess

Irene Radford

DAW

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The plot twists cleverly, the characters are shrewdly drawn, and the political intrigues in particular are all too plausible.

But this second novel in Irene Radford's "Dragon Nimbus" series is a struggle to read — because the names she assigns to people, places, and things jangle on the ear like a roomful of musicians all playing in different keys.

This is also why the present review starts with the second book in the series. I started reading its predecessor, *The Glass Dragon*, not long after it appeared a year or so ago — but put it down, shaking my head, after discovering that much of its plot involved the search for a magical herb called "Tambootie."

Tambootie?

Fortunately, although Tambootie reappears in the present volume, it doesn't do so until the narrative is well underway. Nonetheless, the term is symptomatic of the larger problem with Radford's naming conventions, insofar as they can be established.

And that's the difficulty: few of the individual names sound like they belong on the same continent with each other.

At the geographic level, matters are not too discordant; the three major kingdoms that figure in the story are Coronnan, Rossemeyer, and Selenicca. Of these, "Selenicca," with the odd internal capital is the least well-matched, but

if that was the extent of the naming problem, there'd be little reason to raise a fuss.

But then we hit character-names, and the discordancy escalates. There are at least three separate conventions in use: the "typical invented fantasy world" standard (Senior Magician Baamin, witch-woman Brevelan); the "borrowed from Earth" standard (Sir Holmes, Fred the bodyguard, possibly Prince Darville); and the "cute wordplay" standard (archvillain Krej, whose name is "jerk" spelled backward). And there are further complications; many of Rossemeyer's nobles use "Rosse" as part of their own names — the Princess Rossemikka, for example.

Any one of these general patterns might work on its own, especially if the Earth-borrowings carried any sort of cultural resonance, but Coronnan and the lands around it seem entirely free of Earthly mythic influence. The result is a mishmash of epic proportions, and it makes it very difficult for readers to get hold of and identify with the world in which Radford's story occurs.

That's frustrating, because if one can somehow look past the names, there's a solid, cogently conceived tale in these pages.

Prince Darville's struggle to reconcile a balky royal council, bring several sorts of loose magic under control, and nail down a sticky political alliance — all in the face of opposition both from Krej and from another less obvious enemy — is unfolded with considerable skill, and Radford's characters are far from stereotypical. Structurally and thematically, the tale is a good deal more ambitious than it appears from its packaging.

But the names do get in the way. An herb called Tambootie and a crown known as the Coraurilia don't fit into the same world with an apprentice-mage called Yaakke and a guardsman named Fred.

The real tragedy is that Radford is now stuck with this ill-assorted montage for the duration of the series, so that future entries, however well-crafted, will

still be hidden behind the slapdash appearance given by the nomenclature.

One for the Morning Glory

John Barnes

Tor

\$22.95

A gentle, elegant cross between a swashbuckler and a fairy tale is about the last thing one would expect from a writer whose specialty to date has been hard-edged, dynamic, carefully extrapolated science fiction. But that's what John Barnes delivers in ***One for the Morning Glory***, and it's as fine an example of its kind as Barnes' highly-regarded SF novels have been.

The keystone of the tale, though not its sole protagonist, is Prince Amatus, who suffers a unique accident at the age of two. "A child who tastes the Wine of the Gods too early," goes the saying, "is only half a person afterwards." And so it proves, for when Amatus drinks a glass of the rare beverage, the left side of his body vanishes utterly — not merely invisible, but missing entirely.

As this is a fairy-tale kingdom, however, all is not completely lost. A set of Companions appears and is taken into the King's service: an alchemist, a witch, a guard captain, and a personal maid for Amatus. And as time passes, there are omens and portents and adventures, and gradually three things happen: the Companions fulfill their individual destinies, the prince's body is restored, and the Prince himself reaches manhood just in time to right a long-simmering wrong and fulfill his own destiny in the process.

Yet though the broad outline is squarely in classic fairy-tale tradition, the execution is something else again. The narrative style Barnes adopts is a light, musing scholar's variant of the old "once upon a time" storytelling mode — a tone that looks effortless on the page but which is exceedingly difficult to sustain effectively. Barnes pulls it off beautifully, though, always incisive and insightful but never intrusive.

One of the results of this is that the

novel is often highly amusing, yet not in the broad slapstick or pun-laden sense often typical of “funny fantasy.” Rather, Barnes’ humor has the sometimes wry, sometimes wise air of a favorite grandfather looking back on youthful misdeeds with a self-deprecating chuckle. There is wit and wordplay, to be sure, but it’s of a subtle and sedate character that makes even *The Princess Bride* look raucous.

Another is that characterization, which in fairy tales is frequently a matter of archetype and ritual, is in Barnes’ hands much more subtle and well-developed than is the norm. In part, he manages this by allowing his players to know that they are part of a story, which lets them play slightly against their prescribed roles and adds dimension to the narrative. Again, though, the effect is handled with fine, deft strokes and used only sparingly, so that it remains an atmospheric touch rather than degenerating into farce.

The third of the novel’s distinctive qualities is that it expertly balances a strong sense of pattern against an equally strong sense of mystery. All the fairy tale and folk tale conventions are strictly observed — traditions of quest and sacrifice, romance and rescue, witchery and wonder. But there’s no sense of dominoes merely being knocked over in the proper order, and the means by which the tale proceeds to its resolution are never entirely clear cut. Surprises unfold right up to the closing pages, and yet ultimately fit into the overarching design of the tale so that they look as if they belonged there all along.

One for the Morning Glory is, in short, a genuine masterpiece of craftsmanship — and more, it’s the rare sort of craftwork where seeing how it’s held together only enhances its attractiveness. And it establishes John Barnes as a writer whose versatility is as impressive as his sense of invention. This is a book that’s going to be around for a very long time, and deservedly so.

Caverns of Socrates

Dennis L. McKiernan

Roc **\$14.95**

The idea isn’t as new as you might think; it’s been fully five years since Wm. Mark Simmons’ *In the Net of Dreams* crossed virtual-reality adventure gaming with a spirited exploration of the ethics of artificial intelligence. But Dennis

McKiernan’s new novel takes the premise in a slightly different direction, and while it offers few answers, it asks a host of very good questions in lively and engaging fashion.

Our heroes in McKiernan’s near-future setting are the Black Foxes, role-players who’ve been away from gaming since winning a world championship some years prior to the tale’s opening. Their job is to test the limits of a brand-new VR technology, administered by the synthetic intellect known as Avery. Avery has been programmed with the full history of the Black Foxes’ gaming campaign and assigned to develop a quest which will test both the Foxes’ skills and his own mind-interfacing abilities.

What happens next won’t surprise experienced readers—an electrical accident damages the research facility’s power systems, and it’s uncertain whether the Foxes can be successfully pulled out of the game. Worse, Avery’s own actions are growing unpredictable, and it’s unclear whether the problem is hardware damage, a fatal programming flaw, or Avery’s possible lack of a soul to go with his silicon-based mind. Meanwhile, though, the fantasy adventure goes on inside the system, with the Black Foxes entirely submerged in their game-personas.

Readers expecting the occasionally florid, ornate prose of McKiernan’s “Mithgar” stories will be surprised by this book. The Avery-world in which McKiernan deposits the Foxes is a lightly drawn, straightforward place — a refreshing departure from much VR-fantasy fiction, in which the game settings are often kitchen-sink realms full of anachronisms and tortuous puns. And while it’s ostensibly a game-setting, it’s remarkably free of the echo of dice-rolling or other RPG mechanics. On the flip side of the narrative, the real-world chapters smoothly capture the sophisticated bickering of high-tech academia, made tense and strained by the rapidly escalating crisis of Avery’s malfunctions. Though there’s a fair amount of pure lecture in the early going, as McKiernan sets up his metaphysical conflict, even this is briskly and amiably delivered.

If there’s a criticism to be leveled at *Caverns of Socrates*, it’s that McKiernan — very deftly, to be sure — avoids answering any of the thought-provoking questions he raises about the nature of souls and consciousness. Circumstances in the tale resolve themselves, or appear

to, just in time to prevent an ultimate test from taking place. And Avery’s final legacy to the Black Foxes is a puzzle as well, making the nature of their achievement something of a mystery. The ending is therefore less decisive than it might be, and there are definite foreshadowings of a sequel.

Then again, though, McKiernan’s subject matter is ambiguous by nature. This is easily his strongest and most entertaining work to date, and it’s perhaps unfair to expect him to resolve, even in a fictional context, questions about which humanity has been speculating since the days of the Socrates himself.

The Spirit Gate

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff
Baen

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Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff’s newest novel is intriguing on two counts. First of these is its setting, which looks very much like a rather odd alternate version of medieval Poland. Secondly, the system of magic Bohnhoff invents for the tale is an intriguing construct, at once traditional yet distinctive, and the novel’s exploration of its boundaries is conducted with measured thoughtfulness.

On one hand, *The Spirit Gate* reads much more like traditional fantasy than alternate history. But although the magic-rich if beleaguered realm of “Polia” is clearly Bohnhoff’s invention, the world around it is very like that of historical Europe during the age when Frankish forces, hand in hand with the Roman church, were rapidly asserting dominance over most of that continent. But the Franks are not Polia’s only rivals; there are also Turkish forces beyond one border, and the Mongol hordes past another.

The key to Polia’s long-term security, it seems, is a young widow named Kassia, who has a rare form of magical talent known as the shai gift. Properly trained, her abilities can complement those of the land’s formal mage-priests, the Mateu, permitting the use of spells long thought impossible because of the Mateu’s inability to control all of the elemental forces required to make the magic work.

But while Kassia’s training and mastery are the novel’s focus, Bohnhoff has more in mind than a typical “mage-in-training” tale. The emphasis in Kassia’s studies is on research and theory rather



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than life in a wizards' academy, and political intrigues quickly vie with magical puzzles for Kassia's attention.

In addition, the characterizations are gentler and more subtle than one might expect. There's no doubt, from the first, that Frankish Bishop Benedict is an enemy, but Kassia's mentor, Master Lukasha, is a complicated figure whose priorities shift markedly as the story progresses. And Kassia's relationships with a fellow apprentice and with the Polian ruler are given ample space to grow and develop.

Last but not least, the elementally based magic system is cleverly and carefully thought out, with careful attention to matters of balance and the costs of power. More, the gradual discovery of forgotten or unrecognized aspects of the system is itself integral to the unfolding plot, so the theoretical matter has solid narrative impact rather than being mere window-dressing.

So while *The Spirit Gate* is in many respects a very sedate traditional fantasy, it's also a good deal richer and more subtle than many of its less well-rooted cousins. Bohnhoff's attention to details of history, character, and magic makes this book stand out.

The Instrument of Fate

**Christie Golden
Ace**

5.99

Christie Golden's name will be familiar to many readers as the author of several justifiably well-regarded tales set in the dark realms of the RAVENLOFT® setting. With *The Instrument of Fate*, however, Golden strikes out on her own, crafting a lyrical and mesmerizing novel of compelling music, reclusive elves, and deadly pursuit.

The elves of Golden's world are of a breed increasingly rare in modern fantasy; they are for the most part distrustful of humanity and inclined to set themselves deliberately apart from human influence. Indeed, one group of elves may be considering an open offensive against a nearby human kingdom as the tale begins—which prompts a more tolerant elven lord to dispatch a warning.

That, however, is merely the prologue. The body of the novel is the story of how that warning is delivered, for when the original courier is intercepted, his burden falls into the hands of one Gillien Songespyrner. Suddenly marked for destruction by forces that have



already killed one elf and done away with her family, she quickly realizes that her only hope of survival is to successfully deliver the murdered courier's lute to the queen of Byrn, herself an elf in a human-dominated land.

Golden brings two major strengths to bear on her chronicle: first-rate characterization and an equally sure hand with matters musical. Like the briefly seen courier Jencir, readers will be drawn firmly into Gillien's grasp by the song-performance that marks her entry into the adventure; not only are the lyrics compelling, but so is Golden's description of Gillien's delivery.

Additional song-fragments scattered through the narrative reinforce the impression, as do the scenes in which Gillien forms a bond with the mysterious elven-crafted lute.

But it's not just that Gillien is an appealing character.

Golden's entire cast is equally well-drawn and intriguing, from reluctant bodyguard Daric all the way down to a feisty horse aptly named That Damned Beast. There are no "spear-carriers" in this novel; even characters who appear only briefly are made to seem realistic and lifelike, so that we're genuinely sorry when several of them are ruthlessly dispatched by Gillien's enemies.

And "ruthless" isn't too strong a word; before the adventure is done, there's a rather long trail of death in Gillien's wake, and Gillien herself endures con-

siderable abuse at the hands of her foes.

But while there's no shortage of darkness in *The Instrument of Fate*, it is ultimately a novel about the persistence of hope—even though not all of that hope seems destined to be realized.

The breathlessly-staged climax is both ingenious and bittersweet, with a cluster of expertly sprung revelations that lay the groundwork for a "happily ever after" ending that nonetheless holds its share of sadness. Christie Golden has written a thoroughly memorable novel that deserves a wide and appreciative audience.

Recurring Roles

After a significant hiatus, former computer-guru Wiz Zumwalt returns in Rick Cooks' *The Wizardry Consulted* (Baen, \$5.99).

This isn't the series' strongest entry, but Cooks' mix of Silicon Valley satire and logically defined magic is still reasonably sharp, with the emphasis this time on the satire; one plot follows Wiz as he goes into the consulting business, while another has the FBI investigating certain real-world adjuncts to the magical enterprise going on in Wiz's new reality.

Dragon's Honor (Pocket, \$5.99) is one of the strongest *Star Trek: The Next Generation* novels in some time. Collaborators Greg Cox and Kij Johnson present a clever and frequently very funny scenario in which Picard and company must interact with a culture much like that of Imperial China in all its bureaucratic and artistic glory. Cox and Johnson find room for all the major *Trek* characters to spread their wings, and do better than many *Trek* novelists at capturing the cast's voices on the printed page.

This is one of the rare novels that would make a solid filmed adventure as well, and the comedy is balanced by a solid political-intrigue plot.

Another first-rate feat of juggling shows up in *Wishing Season* (Baen, \$5.99), substantially expanded by Esther Friesner from its previous appearance as a young-adult yarn. This is an Arabian Nights tale with a highly acerbic wit, in which there are genies aplenty and more wishes than any mortal should be allowed to have (but which some mor

Continued on page 75

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Survival of the Smartest

by Lloyd Brown III

illustrated by Christina Wald

What good is a first-level wizard, anyway?

In the AD&D® game, no opponent is more feared than a high-level wizard. They can slay with a word, travel the planes, conjure efreet and fiends, and stop time itself. The trouble is getting there. The average novice wizard has less stamina than the town baker, no armor, and no weapon better than a tree branch. Comparatively, they are almost the equal of a kobold in combat but must amass the equivalent of 358 victories over kobolds to earn enough experience points to reach second level. How do they ever survive?

By their wits, of course.

By the time a 0-level PC or NPC has cast his first magic spell and earned the right to call himself a wizard, he has learned quite a few things, but his studies have consumed much of the time he could have spent learning other things, like intensive weapons studies. First observe the things a wizard can't do, and try to make the most of it. Then catalog the considerable things a novice mage can do, and see how they make their way in the world.

Would-be wizards are advised to listen to the words of the Archmage Tallus, Guildmaster and Dean of the University of Candlekeep, who was a surprise speaker for the College of Magic graduating class of 1321. His experience is vast, and his intellect astounding. His anecdotes tend to involve intricate technical details, some of which go past the heads even of his peers, who have learned to nod their heads and murmur agreement rather than to ask for an explanation. For this reason, large parts of his speech are not repeated here, and notes are given and details explained for the layman.

Armor

"The best armor you're going to find is a good suit of plate mail. Polish it, enchant it if you can, then put it on somebody else and keep him between you and anybody that wants to hurt you. If the armor isn't good enough, use your spells to help out the man wearing it. If a fight goes very badly, you're probably not strong enough to run in 50 pounds of steel, including 10 pounds on your head that limits your sight to a 30 degree arc. A shield spell costs nothing, protects you from magic missiles, doesn't inhibit your vision, and never slows you down. There. I think my opinion of armor is clear."

A wizard cannot wear armor. The restrictions are pretty clear here, and any attempt to fiddle with this rule will most likely lead to abuse. For characters in arctic weather conditions, some DM's may allow heavy clothing to count for AC 9 or even AC 8, but it will almost certainly apply movement or Dexterity penalties as well, probably resulting in a net loss to the PC. Whenever possible, a mage should hide around corners, snipe from a prone position, kneel behind a low wall, or use natural cover to deflect missile attacks and enemy spells.

The best way to compensate for not being able to wear armor is to support the fighters between the novice wizard and the enemy. An *enlarge* spell does this well. (See the *cantrip* ideas listed below for elaborations on this tactic.)

The only advantage here is that the wizard is virtually guaranteed first selection of any magical protections that the party may come across. Magically protective rings, bracers, cloaks, etc. are almost always given first to wizards. These items weigh little and most provide saving throw bonuses as well as Armor Class bonuses.



Weapons and combat tactics

"Whenever possible, stay away from the enemy. This may sound like telling you to stay out of the blast radius of a fireball, but you'd be surprised how many graduates perish trying to be brave. If you can attack by dart, by spell, or better yet, by someone else, then by all means do it! Just because you don't attack by sword or spear doesn't mean that you don't contribute to the fight. Far from it."

According to the *Player's Handbook*, the mage is allowed to choose from five weapons: dagger, dart, knife, staff, and sling. Five weapons makes for poor versatility. Receiving only one proficiency at 1st level makes the decision a tough one. One possibility for improvement is to take a kit that allows the use of different weapons. Ask the DM if the weapons allowed to wu jen, either from the old *Oriental Adventures* book or *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*, are allowed. Barbarian mages may also be allowed different tribal weapons. While this may offer variety, few of these weapons are really an improvement over those already available to mages.

Another option is to petition the DM to allow some other weapons. The choices are restricted to weapons that require little strength or skill. A club hardly requires a great deal of skill, although some degree of strength is required. A net should probably be allowed to wizards, especially if the player is willing to take the fishing non-weapon proficiency in order to justify knowledge of how to use it.

Even choosing among the basic weapons is tricky. Each offers a distinct advantage. First, consider the melee weapons. The staff is a likely choice: it inflicts the most damage of any of the wizard's weapons and costs the least. A good bargain. If lost, a staff is easily replaced. It is also likely to be found in magical form. If the DM allows for it, a fine quality or exceptional quality staff able to provide non-magical attack or damage bonuses could be commissioned at low cost — if a weapon maker skilled at constructing staves can be found. For that matter, a better quality weapon of any sort allowed by a wizard should not be too expensive.

A knife or dagger can be used either as a melee or missile weapon. Although it causes less damage than a staff, a dagger, too, is frequently found in magical form. Knives and daggers have the benefit of being easily concealed.

Several should be carried and at least one kept handy in case the character is caught in a net or in close quarters.

Both the dart and the sling are effective missile weapons. The sling is cheap, highly concealable, inflicts good damage if bullets are used, has virtually limitless backup ammunition in the form of stones, and has excellent range.

Darts, however, are the weapon of choice in close combat. Despite their seemingly puny damage, their high rate of fire means both higher total damage than the sling and multiple target capability. Also, if a wizard's attack or damage capability is magically enhanced in any way, the higher rate of fire capitalizes on that improvement. Improving damage by +1 means only one more point of damage each round with a sling, but potentially three more points of damage with the darts.

Of course, nobody ever said that since a wizard can be proficient with one weapon that he can't carry others. Hard-pressed fighters, acrobatic thieves, and clumsy clerics can all lose weapons sometimes. If a wizard is handy to toss a club or dagger to the newly-unarmed comrade, his companion may not have to face the enemy empty-handed.

These aren't all the weapons allowed by wizards. This survey exhausts the list in the *Player's Handbook* text on mages, but there are others available for the resourceful. Greek fire, holy water, vials of acid, torches, nets, marbles (detailed in *The Complete Thief's Handbook*) and other "equipment" can all be used to harm or hamper the enemy. Wizards should stock up on these items whenever they can afford them. None of them weigh much, and most can be used to affect undead and certain other nasties that can't be hit by nonmagical weapons.

There is still more a wizard can attack with. Some animals have natural attacks more effective than a wizard's dagger or staff. Even a beginning mage can probably afford a trained war or hunting dog. Sturdy (1+1 to 2 HD), fast (MV 12), keen of sense (difficult to surprise), and intelligent, a dog makes a loyal companion. If treated well, he can be a loyal companion for years. A couple of animals can even be bred, and pups trained, especially if the character is skilled in these areas. Characters who buy dogs solely for cannon fodder are warned: even these domestic beasts have their protective deities.

All of these tactics can be applied by

any member of the party. What makes the wizard unique is that each day he can choose a different selection of spells with which to arm himself. When considering which spells he can use to harm the enemy, two things should be remembered. The first is that enemies are often allowed a saving throw or magic resistance check to reduce or avoid damage. Allies don't or won't resist these spells. The second is that indirect attacks can usually be directed against more than one enemy. Consider an *enlarge* spell, a common first-level alteration. *Burning hands* could be used to attack one enemy, if he is within 3' (something most sensible mages avoid). An *enlarged* fighter, even if his damage potential is improved only by one point, can do more damage before the spell's expiration, can attack different targets, and gains other benefits as well (greater reach, overbearing benefits, etc.). Spells like *enlarge* work well on animal companions also. In general, spells that enhance the party's ability to inflict damage are better than those that attempt directly to damage the enemy.

Freedom from front-line combat also puts the wizard in an excellent position for a hands-off leadership role. The wizard can direct the combat and throw his strength where it is needed, acting as a tactical reserve, or he can give commands, serving the party as a combat coordinator.

Starting money

"So you've spent all of your money on books, tuition, and material components. Big deal. What else do you need? You have it all, right there in your hands! Your spellbook and what you put in it are your keys to success. You're the smartest men and women in this city. Use those brains. Money is the least of your worries. Trust me."

Looking at the starting money for the different character groups, it seems that the wizard has the least of the four groups. Instead of looking at starting money, compare what is left over after the necessities are purchased. They actually have the most spending money left over after purchasing weapons and armor. Priests must have a holy symbol, thieves must have lockpicks if they wish to use those abilities that require them, and good weapons and armor for warriors are not cheap. Wizards begin play with a free spellbook, cannot wear armor, and their most expensive weapon costs 2 gp. That leaves quite a

bit left over for other things, like the grenade-like missiles or animals mentioned earlier. This money can even be loaned to other characters who come up a little short when buying expensive weapons or armor. Mages who lend money to these characters are virtually guaranteed a little extra protection in battle.

If a character feels the need for more money, the wizard is in an excellent position to earn more. This is a case where a player must become aggressive with the game and not wait for the DM to drop the next adventure in his lap. Certain spells have great commercial value, even those available to beginning mages. *Detect magic*, *erase*, *read magic*, *comprehend languages*, and *identify* all have obvious uses and are sometimes commissioned by those without these abilities. If a mage lets it be known that he is willing to perform these services for money, customers may seek him out. Some other spells have applications to a more select market, mostly shady or questionable. The thieves guild can be a good customer for these spells. *Armor*, for example, gives a thief the benefits of an Armor Class better than he can achieve by wearing the armor types allowed for thieves, and it still gives him ability benefits of not wearing armor. A thief fearing violence would be wise to have this spell cast on him.

On the other side of the law, *wizard mark* can be used to identify property in case it is stolen. Revealing an invisible *wizard mark* can spell doom for a would-be thief who claims a stolen item belongs to him. Rich merchants or nobles might wish to have their valuables protected in this way. The same rich merchants would pay a bundle to have *mending* cast on an antique vase worth over 3,000 gp that had been knocked over by a careless servant. The servant himself might even bring the vase to the caster, hoping to fix the damage before his master came home and noticed it.

It is common procedure to ask that the purchaser provide his own material components, which the spell-caster always overstates, as part of his "mark-up." This can provide the caster with valuable material components for spells that he could not normally afford to cast, like the aforementioned *wizard mark*.

If a wizard character is ever really, really in great need of cash, all wizards are assumed to begin with a spellbook.

A blank spellbook has 100 pages, valued at 100 gp per page — a 10,000 gp asset! Hocking your only spellbook, buying piles of armor, weapons, and good quality equipment for the party, hoping for a successful adventure before the due date on the pawn, than buying back that spellbook, is about as risky as chancing a game of chess on a queen sacrifice — but what a story if you pull it off!

Spellcasting between adventures

"Any mage who waits for a written invitation before casting a spell ought to be drawn and quartered. If you have the ability to protect yourself or your friends, do it in the safety and privacy of your home. Waiting until you see the whites of their eyes may be fine for attack, but it's suicide for a defensive position."

Spellcasting should not be limited to active adventuring periods. Some spells, like *armor*, mentioned above, have no set expiration time. If this spell is known, it should be cast on the wizard, his pets or familiar, the party thief, and any priests who are not allowed to wear heavy armor. Between adventures is the time the character casts a *detect magic* spell, item by item, on all of those potential magical things picked up in the last adventure and then casts *identify* on those that turn up positive. Spells that are commonly cast for others for money can be cast for the wizard and his party, as well. Scrolls can be read, broken weapons can be mended, and valuable property *wizard marked*.

Finally, new spells can be chosen. A wise spellcaster remembers which spells went unused, which were useful only in certain situations, and which were enormously successful. This critical feedback at low levels makes all the difference when a wide selection of spells is available at higher levels.

Spell selection

"So now you have the things you think you'll need. You are loaded down with spellbook, food, water, volatile compounds, incendiary missiles, pungent material components, daggers, darts, and a staff. You have it all, right?"

"Wrong. What spells are you going to use? Figure you'll just make that part up as you go, huh? Bad idea. Right now is the time for you to decide what spells are the most important, because you don't have much

choice. If you take one spell and never use it, you're worse than useless — you're in the way. Don't wait until you see your enemies before you cast a spell. Good spellcasting may mean you never have to meet the enemy. The only combat you're guaranteed not to get killed in is the one you don't fight."

When a caster has only one or just a few spells, selection is vital. Between gaming periods, as mentioned earlier, the spells memorized are not important, unless the DM likes to spring adventures on you without warning. When a set goal is known, and the party has time to pack up before leaving the safety of the inn or boarding house, spells should be chosen with care.

Most 1st-level attack spells cause damage less than or equal to a single sword thrust. Choosing these attack spells (*magic missile*, *shocking grasp*, *burning hands*) means that the wizard has one attack in which he is as effective as a fighter for a single round. *Shocking grasp* and *burning hands* especially require the caster to get uncomfortably close to his opponent. Given the choice, these should be avoided.

If a player wishes to choose an attack spell, consider *color spray*, *sleep*, or *charm person* (to attack with an intermediary). These all have advantages: *color spray* and *sleep* both affect multiple targets with no saving throw, and *charm person* can have an extraordinary duration.

All things considered, the beginning mage is best suited to let the rest of the party attack. Looking at the numbers, an orc armed with a spear or short sword is likely to kill a 1st-level wizard with average hit points and AC 10 after only two rounds of combat. For this reason, defensive spells should take priority over attack spells.

Good defensive spells include *armor*, as already discussed, *shield* (which provides a good Armor Class plus total immunity to *magic missiles*), and *protection from evil* (which can provide complete protection against certain monsters). The latter two, while providing good protection, have a duration limiting their usefulness to one battle or fraction of a battle. Other defensive spells are either too specific (like *gaze reflection*) or less effective than the normal, non-magical way of doing things (*hold portal*). *Wall of fog* provides adequate cover for the entire party to make a retreat, or confound an enemy, giving time to prepare an ambush or light Greek fire, heal wounded, or some other action. *Feather*

fall, in addition to its conventional usage, can save a single party member from a single missile attack that might hit. Once.

The problem with these spells is their limited duration. If the enemy also beats a hasty retreat from the wall of fog, or waits until the protection from evil is expired, the spell allowed for only a momentary respite from battle. This may be useful, but the caster now has no spell to cast to save the party again.

The only 1st-level spell that circumvents this one-shot usage hindrance is *cantrip*. With a duration of one hour per level, it can affect multiple combats and the important non-combat situations in between.

Using the cantrip

"Let me tell you about my first adventure. I don't recall exactly what we were there for, but that old wooden hill fort stands out clearly in my mind. I had chosen cantrip for my only spell, and my companions thought I was crazy. When the goblins started pouring out of their little trapdoors, I heard, 'Put 'em to sleep!', 'Charm one!', 'Magic missile the leader!' Well, I couldn't do any of that, so they formed an arc, backed me into a corner, and told me to stay alive so they could kill me themselves later.

"Xavier, our war-priest, stood in front of me, waving a huge axe. Attacking those little vermin made him look like a giant slug on a cold day. I used a quickblade¹ to help him out a little. I alternated that with the opposite, leadblade², on the goblins he was fighting. One of the squirmy little monsters snuck in under his legs and tried to attack me. I turned my hands black — so they looked leprous — with a blackhands³ and reached out to touch him. He backed up enough to run into Xavier's backswing. After that, their slingers started targeting me. I used an evocation, minor shield⁴, to deflect their arrows as much as possible.

"Then I noticed a dark elf standing in their midst, directing their attack. Standing on his shoulder was a beady-eyed little rat. A familiar: perfect target for a cantrip. Sure enough, the rat jumped off and started running around, squeaking here and scurrying there. I put a minor slow⁵ on him when he got close and told Shadow, our thief, to go get him. Holding him hostage, we made the

dark elf pull back his goblins and made our escape, were able to convince the regular army to make it a military operation and wiped the goblins out. I've memorized at least one cantrip ever since."

Before discussing the myriad applications of the *cantrip*, the exact limits of the spell need to be defined further than in the *Player's Handbook*. The rules governing *cantrips* say that "they are completely unable to cause a loss of hit points." This rule is pretty clear and needs little elaboration. The DM must decide, however, whether he will allow for adding to hit points lost by other means. The *cantrip* "cannot affect the concentration of spellcasters." This also is clear, but it must be noted that concentration need not be affected to effectively ruin a spell. Many spells are sight-targeted, and impeding the caster's vision may make using the spell impossible, even if it is successfully cast. The *cantrip* "can only create small, obviously magical materials." How big is small? One pound per level of the caster, up to 10 lbs., is not unreasonable. As for volume, small should fit in the caster's hand.

The last restriction, that a *cantrip* "lacks the power to duplicate any other spell's effects" needs the most clarification. Read strictly, a phantasmal force can create any visual illusion, so a *cantrip* cannot. A *ventriloquism* or *audible glamor* can create an auditory illusion, so a *cantrip* cannot. An *unseen servant* can move things, so a *cantrip* cannot. A *light* can create illumination, etc. A more appropriate reading is that the *cantrip* cannot duplicate the exact extent of another spell. Illusions must be a limited to certain size (10 square feet, for example) and will fool only the stupidest observers, as they will be semi-transparent and wavering, at best. Sound volume should be limited to a human voice at conversational levels, ability to move objects should be equal to a Strength score of 3, and light should be no more than the output of a single candle.

As they are introduced, DM's should make other decisions about *cantrip* applications. Some are very strong for one-shot uses, and should be restricted to one use per casting. Others should be allowed to maintain as long as the cast-

er concentrates. Some other restrictions: no more than one application at a time can be maintained. Beginning a new one cancels the previous application. Effect on chances to succeed at any feat should never be more than 5% or +1. Defensive applications should never reduce damage by more than one hit point.

Magic item use

"In the desert, they have a saying: 'the best place to keep your water is in yourself.' In other words, don't save it. Use it. If any of you graduates dies with spells uncast, I'll personally raise you and beat you for it. That goes double for unused magic items that your non-spellcasting companions can't use."

Wizards have the greatest number of magic items available to them. Even at 1st level, a wizard can use nearly any of these items. Any charged or one-shot magical items found should be used in an appropriate situation, without considering saving it for later. The only exception is if you know in advance that the party must face an enemy that cannot be harmed by any other means you currently possess. Again, this rule itself is invalid if it looks like you're going to die before you get there. If you're saving the scroll of *Melf's minute meteors* for use against a gargoyles (which can be hurt only by magical items or magic spells), but it looks like the ogre you can't avoid now will wipe you out, there is no sense saving the scroll. This applies to all wands, staves, scrolls, potions, certain charged rings, and non-permanent miscellaneous items.

"I'm sure you're itching to start spell-casting and get to trying all these ideas, so I'll let you get on with your ceremony after one more word of advice. Well, praise, maybe. You've made a wise choice to become a wizard. None of your companions has the potential that you do. When you get older, you'll be a major power in the world. Until then, be careful, and good luck!"



Lloyd Brown III is a gamer who lives in Florida. He has written for DRAGON® Magazine before.

1. Reduced his speed factor by one, that is.

2. Raised speed factor by one. The goblin received a saving throw (standard when a *cantrip* is used on an unwilling target).

3. This is especially effective if the potential victims see the caster touch a companion, who shrieks horribly and keels over.

4. Improves AC by one against missile attacks

coming from 10 yards or greater. It is too slow to be useful in other situations

5. Slows by ½ one animal of size T. Normal save allowed.



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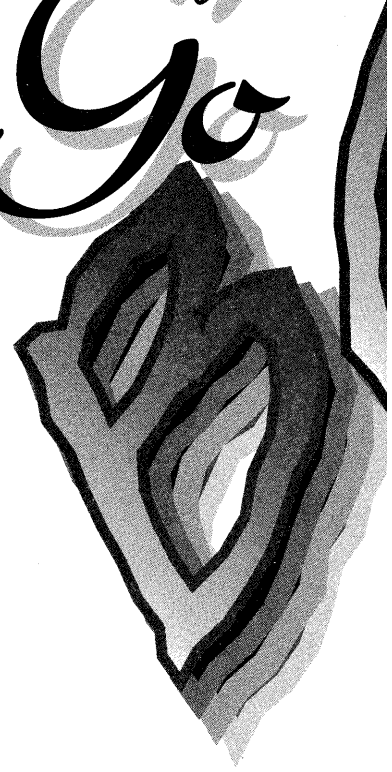
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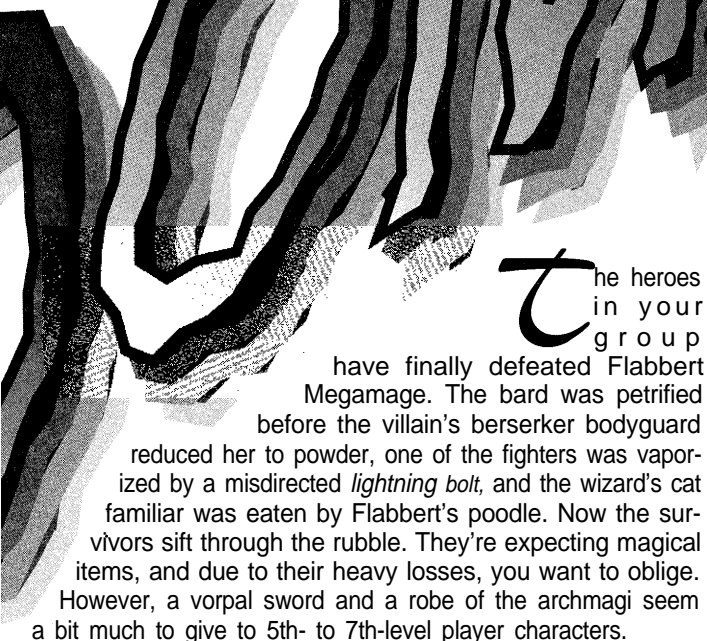
Magic Doesn't Always Go



by Christopher Byler

illustrated by Larry Smith

Not all magic has to be high-powered; little things count, too.



The heroes in your group have finally defeated Flabbert Megamage. The bard was petrified before the villain's berserker bodyguard reduced her to powder, one of the fighters was vaporized by a misdirected lightning bolt, and the wizard's cat familiar was eaten by Flabbert's poodle. Now the survivors sift through the rubble. They're expecting magical items, and due to their heavy losses, you want to oblige. However, a vorpal sword and a robe of the archmagi seem a bit much to give to 5th- to 7th-level player characters.

The problem with the current list of magical items is their emphasis on battle applications. Weapons, armor, staves, clothing, even most potions and miscellaneous magic items, either by design or player ingenuity, find use primarily during combat.

Herein lies the source of campaign imbalance. PCs become more heavily armed than a battleship, and character sheets are soon overloaded with attack, damage, and AC bonuses. Mid-level PCs are lethal opponents for even the deadliest foes. Much to the Dungeon Master's chagrin, the campaign has become a Monty Haul horror. Players doze during random encounters. Combat, while no challenge to the PCs, becomes a nightmare for the DM as he secretly adds hit points to a monster that was, technically, dead four rounds ago.

Campaign problems like this arise when players see the game as a string of battles because the DM allows little time to role-play other aspects of the characters' lives. The players choose different character classes because some aspect of each class appeals to them. The DM should tailor magical treasures as well as adventures to all abilities and interests present in his group.

Most campaign worlds are infused with enough magic that it should find its way into most aspects of life. Three types of such magic are herein introduced.

Proficiency magic can make even an average practitioner of a nonweapon proficiency seem like a master. *Skill magic* capitalizes

on the non-proficiency skills available to some classes and kits. *Practical magic* encompasses the myriad other aspects of life and the ways magical inventors have made life easier.

Proficiency magic

Players and DMs frequently overlook a character's nonweapon proficiencies. Abilities such as brewing, juggling, carpentry, and astrology take a backseat to spells and combat prowess. If DMs make nonweapon proficiencies more important in the game, the door to new magic items swing wide open.

Proficiency magic items work in one of two ways. Items of proficiency grant any person using them the ability to perform as if he were truly proficient. Thus a pair of *gloves of juggling* give its wearer a proficiency in juggling equal to his Dexterity score -1 (see page 76 of the *Player's Handbook* for proficiency tables). If he is a skilled juggler, the gloves confer no extra benefit.

Items of mastery increase a character's chance of performing admirably in a proficiency he already has. This bonus, like magical weapons and armor, is expressed as a "plus." Instead of affecting attack rolls or saving throws, the "plus" gives the PC a bonus to his proficiency checks. If a PC is a proficient angler with a Wisdom of 13, he requires a roll of 12 or less on a d20 (Wisdom -19 to be successful. If he uses a *fishing lure* +2, he needs to roll a 14 or less (Wisdom -1 +2) to make a catch.

Items of proficiency and items of mastery can be used in conjunction, though the instances of a PC having access to both types of items for the same proficiency should be rare. A *hammer of stonemasonry* could be used with a *mason's chisel* +1 by a non-proficient character for a final proficiency check of the PC's Strength -1. Similar items of different proficiencies may not be used in conjunction to combine their effects. A *hammer of carpentry* cannot be used with a *mason's chisel* +1, nor can a *saddle of horsemanship* be used with a *Pegasus bridle* +2.

Items of proficiency created for the same proficiency, if used together, confer no bonuses beyond the use of that non-weapon proficiency. However, two items of mastery created for the same proficiency may be used together, combining their bonuses. Again, this should be rare. For example, a PC who is a proficient cobbler could use a *shoeform* +1 with a *cobbler's hammer* +2, altering her check by +3, to her Dexterity score +3. This only works if the items were not created as a set.

Proficiency magic items are occasionally created as sets. A toolbox full of *enchanted carpentry tools*, a sewing kit +3, or a *hammer and anvil of blacksmithing*, if found as a complete set, must be used without other tools or the magic is not passed to the user. Unless the DM decides otherwise, individual items are assumed to have been created singly, for use independent of a set.

It should be noted that items of proficiency do not permanently bestow proficiency upon a character, nor do items of mastery grant a permanent bonus to proficiency checks. The magic functions only while the items are used in the performance of their designated proficiency.

No more than two proficiency magic items may be used by a PC at a time. As with magical rings, attempting to use more than two at once causes them all to simply cease functioning. A set is considered to be a single item.

It is suggested that the enchantment of any item of mastery



not exceed +3. After all, the character, not the item, should do most of the work.

Below is a list of nonweapon proficiencies with suggestions for magic items that can be used to enhance the proficiency of each. This list is far from complete, and a little research and ingenuity can inspire endless possibilities.

(The following abbreviations are: *PHB*, *Player's Handbook*; *CTH*, *The Complete Thief's Handbook*; *CBD*, *The Complete Book of Dwarves*; *CRH*, *The Complete Ranger's Handbook*; *CSH*, *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook*).

- Animal Noise (*CTH*) — Bird whistle +1, chatterbox of the squirrel.
- Artistic Ability (*PHB*) — Paintbrush of artistry, sculptor's chisel + 1.
- Astrology (*PHB*) — Orrery +2, star charts of the astrologer
- Cartography (*CRH*) — Mapmaker's kit +3.
- Cooking (*PHB*) — Skillet of frying, spice rack +2, chefs hat.
- Determine Grade or Slope in Passage (*CBD*) — Dwarven level +2.
- Diagnostics (*CPH*) — Forensic gloves +2, medical kit of diagnosis.
- Dwarven Weaponsmithing (*CBD*) — Forge of the dwarven axesmiths.
- Falconry (*CRH*) — Gauntlet of falconry, falcon hood +3.
- Navigation (*PHB*) — Astrolabe +1, navigator's star charts.
- Numeracy (*CSH*) — Abacus of computation +3.
- Pottery (*PHB*) — Wheel of pottery potter's kiln + 1.
- Reading/Writing (*PHB*) — Eyes of reading, quill of writing. (These items are attuned to a specific language, and may be found as a set. Unlike other proficiency items, these are never made as items of mastery.)
- Seamstress/Tailor (*PHB*) — Thimble of tailoring, needle +2.
- Tattooing (*CSH*) — Needle and pigments of tattoo artistry.
- Trailing (*CTH*) — Eyes of trail perception, trailing dust + 1.
- Ventriloquism (*PHB*) — Dummy of ventriloquism, voice thrower +3.

Knowledge is power

DMs who like placing books in treasure hoards but cringe at ability score or level enhancement may find these ideas welcome. These tomes, though magical, don't create super-characters. They give the PCs an edge through knowledge.

Books of proficiency, when studied for eight hours a day for two weeks, give the

PC a free knowledge proficiency such as agriculture, engineering, languages, and spellcraft. The magic of the book permanently inscribes the information in the character's mind, so no proficiency slots need to be available to gain the proficiency. The character's proficiency score in this free ability is the same as if the character had spent a slot on it. The exception to this is if the PC already has the proficiency the book covers. In this case, the study of the book increases the character's understanding of the field, granting the character a permanent +1 bonus to his proficiency checks, just as if he had spent an additional slot on it. A PC may benefit from study of the book only once in his lifetime, and if another book on the subject is ever found, study confers no additional benefit.

Books of the bards are tailored to the unique talents of this class. Whether the book is a collection of inspired poetry, off-color goblin jokes, or eloquent historical narrative, it expands the bard's repertoire. After two weeks of study, the bard can use the knowledge magically bestowed to modify saving throws against his attempts to influence reactions (+ or -1 on a d20) or improve his chance of knowing about a magical item (+5% on d100). Variations may exist, at the DM's option, for the kits listed in *The Complete Bard's Handbook*.

Skill magic

While typically receiving more attention than nonweapon proficiencies, the skills granted by a character's race, class, or kit also find themselves glossed over in favor of combat and spell-slinging. Skill magic brings these abilities into the limelight.

Class items are most frequently created for use by rogues, due to the large number of non-proficiency skills at their disposal, though other classes enjoy their own unique items.

Pages 90-102 of *The Complete Thief's Handbook* contain a list of additional equipment used by thieves to gain non-magical bonuses to thief skills. Any of these may be enchanted for even greater effectiveness. This enchantment is expressed as a "plus," though each "plus" actually represents a 5% bonus to the skill roll. The magical bonus is cumulative with the equipment's typical, nonmagical bonus.

Class items that improve a skill usable by more than one class may be used only by a character for whose class the item was created. For example, a pair of *thiefs scissors* +1 grants its +5% bonus to a thief using it to pick pockets, but a bard cannot

use it as effectively, and will not receive the bonus. Conversely, a *rangers shadowcloak* +3 will not impart its 15% bonus to a thief trying to hide in shadows. If the DM desires, the bonus granted to the item's class may become a penalty if used by another class.

Another type of skill magic, though rare, does occasionally turn up. Race items are designed to improve a character's racial abilities or to impart these abilities to a member of a different race. A race item is always keyed to the race for which it was created. A character of any other race is entirely unaffected by its use. For example, if a *monocle of infravision* was made for a human, only a human can use it — even a half-elf gains no benefit from the item.

Here is a short list of skill magic items to get your creative juices started:

- *Boots of muffled footfalls* +1 (Move Silently).
- *Dwarven goggles of enhanced infravision* +1: Items of this nature extend infravision 10' per "plus," to a maximum of 60' (+6).
- *Elven helm of doors* + 1 (gives an elf +1 bonus on any die to his chance of finding a secret or concealed door. Such an item — which may also be a tiara, hairpin, or even just a hat — may never be enchanted with more than one "plus").
- *Forestcloak* +1 (Hide in Shadows).
- *Gloves of light-fingeredness* +3.
- *Hacksaw of speed* ("cuts" sawing time in half).
- *Horn of hearing* +2 (Detect Noise).
- *Infravision Spectacles* (this type of item, created for people normally lacking infravision, imparts an infravision range of 30').
- *Magnifying lens* +2 (Find/Remove Traps).
- *Thief's lock picks* +2.
- *Shadowcloak* +3 (Hide in Shadows).

Practical magic

The remaining aspects of a character's life provide a near infinite source of ideas for practical magic items.

A bard with a penchant for mead who wishes to drink nothing else, a dwarf whose stubby fingers make fire-starting difficult, and a traveling mage who enjoys soaking in a hot bath while studying spells all have problems not easily solved with existing magical items.

Practical magic items have no actual

"pluses." They move, work, transform, or create things in minor ways for convenience. Their applications are only limited by the imaginations of the players and the rulings of the DM. Therefore, it may be possible to impress a band of superstitious kobolds with *flint and steel of instant flame*, but not to blind them.

Here is a short list of ideas, a kind of imaginative jump-start for DMs:

Steins and goblets that transform any liquid into ale, spirits, mead, wine, champagne, etc., preserve a small portion of a PC's weekly expenses. Imagine doorknobs that sound an alarm (as the first-level spell) when they are touched. Animated chairs or bathtubs (complete with running hot and cold water) allow mages to memorize spells and clerics to pray on the go. Spice containers that never run out or a jar that pickles anything put into it are an innkeeper's dream.

How about saddles and bridles that fasten themselves onto the PC's steed, or an hourglass that turns itself over on the hour? Barrels that roll when tipped, even uphill, provide transport for equipment or strong-stomached PCs? Steel chains that weigh close to nothing might come in handy. Boots that never allow the wearer's feet to get wet, or self-erecting tents would be boons to campaigners.

Merchants will welcome a scale weighted in their favor, with magic masking the bias. Parents clamor for clothing that never gets dirty. Busy bureaucrats value a quill pen that takes perfect dictation. Collapsible ladders, blankets that keep their user magically warm, saddles that ensure comfort for both rider and steed, and self-heating frying pans can all make life easier without creating campaign imbalances.

Many more magic items can be created if the players and DM don't concentrate on combat, specific spells, and related game bonuses. Intelligent furniture, floating books, self-lighting candles, even an outhouse equipped with small disintegration chambers (under the seat, of course) add to the sense of wonder necessary for a fantasy campaign.

Don't ignore combat magic — after all, you want your PCs to have a fair chance in a fight — but never forget the peaceful applications of the art that would flourish in a fantasy setting.

Christopher Byler lives and games in California.

Books

Continued from page 64

tals get anyway). For sly comedy, sharp-tongued talking cats, and devious applications of magic, Friesner can't be matched and never disappoints.

Kingdom of sorrow (Boulevard, \$5.99) qualifies as a "Recurring Role" because half of author Kenyon Morr is actually Mark Sumner, known under his own name for several excellent teen thrillers and for work in the Magic: the Gathering* milieu. With collaborator Marella Sands, Sumner presents the second tale in a series set in the "King's Quest" computer-game universe, and delivers a novel that shouldn't be overlooked even by those unacquainted with that setting. Sumner and Sands tell a smoothly understated tale involving faerie magic, an ensorcelled giant, and a strong sense of royal duty. Those who complain about the quality of tie-in fiction should read this novel, and may change their minds afterward.

John C. Bunnell lives, writes, and reads in a Portland, Oregon apartment containing too many books and too few bookcases. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" can be sent to him at 6663 S.W. Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway, Portland, OR 97225-1403.

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Tales of the Fifth Age



The Taking of Mount Nevermind

by David Wise

*Artwork by
Terry Dykstra*

8 SE:

Through the year, the Dragon Purge continued unabated across Ansalon as the Great Dragons sought to defeat and steal away one another's innate magical energy. By this time, the strongest and smartest were emerging, and, by all counts, Pyrothraeus the Red was both.

— from the *Chronicles of Nathal*, compiled in 31 SE

Pyrothraxus couldn't believe his luck!

He perched atop the conical, sheared-off summit of a dead volcano that rose out of the Sirion Sea, just west of Ergoth, and bared his teeth in a draconic grin. From his commanding vantage point he circled again and again, coiling as he rotated, searching in every direction for any sign of another dragon's presence on the great island. The great red wyrm peered down the rocky folds of the mountain's flanks — looking for bones and other scraps of a dragon's repast, or maybe an old hide, sloughed off and cast aside — but he spotted nothing beyond wisps of mist among the woods that clung to the precipitous slopes. He squinted into the depths of the volcano's stony maw, lined with great crumbling walls of scree, and discerned no evidence of his kind there either. Fairly satisfied that the island lay unoccupied, Pyrothraxus inhaled deeply and then roared at the top of his lungs, daring any dragon within earshot to answer his claim. His howl shook loose a half-dozen rock slides in the gigantic bowl below before it rumbled across the water to the shores of Ergoth and beyond — and it left him clutching his head with both foreclaws.

Pyrothraxus's high-crested, horned crown, all knotty and covered with vermillion-and-black scales, had been throbbing torturously for hours, as it always did after he killed and absorbed the magical power of rival dragons. Today he had vanquished no less than *three* of them: two blacks and another red! Assimilating their arcane essences left him feeling as though his brain had been filled with fire ants, and now his bellicose roar had aggravated that pain. No matter; to the victorious Pyrothraxus, it was worth every twinge.

"Pyrothraxus, you are so-o-o powerful, your voice itself is pain," he declared. "What creature would be foolish enough to answer that call, hmm? None! Pyrothraxus is lord and master of this land!" he said, savoring the sound of his own name. "Pyrothraxus the powerful, Pyrothraxus the great! *Pyrothr-r-r-raxus!* Destiny grants you this prime territory!"

Still, could it be possible that no other wyrm claimed this island? Six years had passed since the Great Dragons come back to Ansalon from across the sea, and surely in that time at least one of them must have found this choice spot, even though it was on the far side of the continent. There had to be *something* wrong with it, some reason no one else inhabited the region, let alone defended it from him (albeit fruitlessly, of course). Pyrothraxus knew he should investigate further before settling in, but he was tired. Dead tired.

Asleep on the wing, and a little hurt from his battles today.

In several places across his dark orange belly, claw marks sliced through three and four of his wide, crimson-edged scales. Gory meat within swelled malignantly, pushing apart the seeping wounds. Acid burns spattered his crimson wings, leaving great expanses of the leathery webbing charred and porous. On the back of his neck, the jagged gouge of a murderous bite festered and burned infectiously. On top of all that, his throat felt raw from too much fire breathing.

Sleep was what he really needed right now. Sleep, as precious as a hoard of maroon sapphires.

Pyrothraxus waited as long as he could for the answering cry of a rival dragon, until the only thing that kept him awake was the steady pounding behind his slitted yellow eyes. With a final glance around, he spread his wings, slipped from the pinnacle, and glided into the hollow of the dead volcano, seeking some cleft to crawl under. Sure enough, when he floated to the base of the stony bowl an overhang revealed itself to him, under which an ample cavern led into darkness. The dragon settled to rest at its mouth and sniffed suspiciously at an odd odor that tickled and flared his fire-blackened nostrils. Something lived down there, but he couldn't quite place the scent. Pyrothraxus was too exhausted to care. This was his island now, and whatever lived in the mountain might make a good breakfast after he slept. He entered the cool darkness and shimmied on his belly, careful of his tender wounds, until he found a nice, level area about a dozen tail-lengths in. Gratefully he coiled up and settled in for a nice nap.

"Pyrothraxus," he uttered with a sigh, noting how the sound bounced off the walls. No rival could approach him unheard down here. At last, he nestled his snout under a wing and drifted off to sleep.

As he slipped through the silken veil of slumber, some distant noise drifted behind Pyrothraxus's receding consciousness, agitating his distrustful mind. The sound had no immediate identity — just a faint rustling and clanking, perhaps like something being dragged along. With fading care, the dragon decided it must be nothing more than a coming dream, woven of natural echoes in the caves under him. Nevertheless, his angular ears instinctively rose slightly to draw in the disturbance....

"I think it's this way, based upon my calculations of how sound travels in confined spaces, modified by the type of rock, the general texture of the walls, floor, and ceiling, with compensations for the general vertical structure of the passageways, not to mention the average volume of the dragon's

breathing, which, if measured against this scale that I have constructed (which can tell you the approximate size of the creature as well, by the way), and also —”

“I beg to differ, I beg to differ! You have forgotten to account for the density of the air, and, besides, the caverns in that direction are much too small to accommodate a dragon, and if you spent as much time as I have mapping the upper reaches since the Great Remodeling,* then you would know that...”

Pyrothraxus cracked an eyelid.

“...this is the only way in which it could possibly lie. Why, if you put your hand to your ear and cup it — no, no, no! Not over your ear, you rube! Like this. As I was saying, if you cup your hand by your ear and stand with your head at a forty-five degree angle, then you can tell that the tangent of the echo comes off of the ceiling, which means that it bounced off that wall there, which means —”

“You are wrong, sir. You are wrong. If you will kindly put your head against this wall and rock it back and forth, you will note that the breathing —”

“Whoever you are,” interrupted Pyrothraxus, “you’ll both find me soon enough if you follow the sound of my voice.”

“Why, thank you!” responded not two but six high-pitched voices, which continued with six separate, simultaneous soliloquies on theories of sound, the density of volcanic stone, some apparatus designed to climb stone surfaces, devices that could make a large body’s location plain to anyone, materials that receive and transmit vibrations, and a way to illuminate the darkness using an elaborate system of bat-powered windmills.

“Shut up!” snarled the dragon, beginning to feel a grating in his aching skull.

“He’s talking to you!” whispered one of the approaching strangers.

“No, you!”

“No, you!”

“No, you!”

“I’m talking to all of you!” bellowed Pyrothraxus, wincing at the sharpness of his own voice. His headache was deepening. Whatever they were, he would kill them instantly if they were foolish enough to come within reach. “Come to the sound of my voice,” he added soothingly. “Come and view the magnificent Pyrothraxus the Red.”

The voices continued in a hushed debate, further muffled by the knock and grind of whatever they were bringing with them. Soon, the first beams of their lanterns broke the crest of the cavern’s floor

where it dropped away, leading deeper into the volcano. Moments later, the intruders poked their heads into view and peered with shining, inquisitive eyes at the great red. Curly white hair and beards glowed against light cocoa skin that glistened with sweat in the light they brought with them. As the trespassers climbed fully into view, they grew still more dazzling with their bright-colored clothing and polished tools that swung from belts around their pudgy paunches and from backpacks, which seemed even larger than their bearers. Over their collective shoulders, the six of them slung a long, fat cord of some sort.

Pyrothraxus’s snout wrinkled in disgust. Now he realized why no other dragon had claimed this island: It was infested with gnomes! *That* was the odd smell he’d noticed. Pyrothraxus hadn’t crossed paths with a gnome since he was a punk lizard, when his mother tricked him into eating one by telling him they tasted like chicken. He wouldn’t make that mistake again, but he couldn’t have the little pests crawling all over him while he slept, either. Where there were six of these gnats, there were bound to be six thousand more!

Three of them immediately began to spread the cord along the floor while the other three busied themselves unloading their packs and setting up some sort of peculiar contraption. “Welcome to Mount Nevermind, good dragon sir! Be right with you,” said the fattest one, who then turned his back to supervise the rest of the party, arguing and ordering them about. Pyrothraxus blinked and stared while the gnomes worked, befuddled by their boundless gall in his exalted presence. Surely the mere sight of a 300-foot-long red dragon would scare almost anything to death, yet these creatures cheerfully constructed their machine, obviously thrilled rather than terrified before a reptile large enough to swallow them all at once. (Not that he would, but they didn’t know that.) They busily attached bladderlike bags to each end of the cord and ran hoses out them, which connected to wooden containers at either side, and then strung a series of ropes and pulleys back and forth along the entire length of the thing.

Shortly, two of the gnomes began to jump up and down on the bladders while two more yanked at the ropes, engaging the pulleys. A misty spray hissed out of tiny holes in the fat cord and quickly began to fill the air. Pyrothraxus sniffed defensively but realized it was just oily water.

“What, in the name of the Dark Queen’s talon, is that?” he asked.

* The “Great Remodeling” is a reference to the explosion touched off by the gnomes during the Summer of Chaos.

"Just a little something I invented especially for this occasion," responded the stout one, who approached the dragon and bowed deeply, teetering precariously. The sixth meddler pulled out a tablet and began furiously to scribble notes in it, looking back and forth from the machine to Pyrothraxus.

"It is my belief," continued the speaker, "that a cool mist of water combined with extract of aloe and a few other, secret ingredients I have concocted will thwart the effects of — *ahem* — dragon breath (if you'll pardon the expression). I thought that, after a few questions and answers, you might be so good as to *make fire*, as you dragons do. You see, we've been looking for a reliable source of power to drive some of our machines, and your apparent ability to generate extraordinary heat at will might be just the thing! Now, if you don't mind, we have just a few short questions to ask you — thirty or forty ought to do it for this first visit, and then I'd like you to —" *Squish!*

Pyrothraxus lifted his claw and curled his lip at the remains of the creature under it. He hoped he could sleep with *that* decomposing near by; these little bugs were so aromatic alive, he couldn't imagine what they smelled like dead. The dragon lifted his eyes toward the rest of the gnomes. The jumpers paused in their jumping, and the pulley workers paused in their pulleying, apparently not having considered protection against being stepped on, and scratched their heads in annoyance. The writer looked up from his scratching and cried, "Hey! You killed Talimorrandorfinlindle..."

The massive beast drew breath, and the scribe paused in mid-name.

"This is it!" shrieked the gnomes, and the lot of them scrambled for cover. Pyrothraxus inhaled deeply, allowing the heat to swell a few extra moments in his belly before heartily disgorging it in a gout of blistering fire. Radiant white flames rolled across the cavern floor like raging thunder, flooding the vault and rushing down its labyrinthine throat. As the infernal tidal wave swept over the fleeing gnomes, the mist they had created hissed and thickened into a steam that blotted out the chamber, blinding Pyrothraxus in spite of his ability to see in perfect darkness.

Somewhere in the void, one or two cries of mingled panic and elation went up, alerting Pyrothraxus that some of them were getting away, so he sprang to his feet and leaped after them, bent upon smearing every last one of the impudent little brutes across the walls of his caverns. Impulsively the giant wyrm hurled himself forward with all of his might, howling to inject terror into

their souls — and drove his head full-force into a plunging overhang of solid granite!

The crack of his skull rang like an immense, dull bell and reverberated through the volcano, even triggering a small landslide outside. Brilliant white stars streaked behind Pyrothraxus's eyes, and he fell to the floor like a tree struck by lightning. In every passing second of the ensuing virtual eternity, the throb intensified, until he could do nothing but helplessly coil up and retch. The writhing dragon desperately wished he could just black out, yet his peeling torment would have no part of it.

Somewhere in the throes of anguish, it occurred to Pyrothraxus that he should leave this place immediately. Sweet as the location might be, gnomes were as difficult to eradicate as stirges in the weeds, and they were thrice as pesky. They had no sense, no fear of impending death, no respect for their betters. One might as well hunt roaches until he dropped. Definitely, the best thing to do was leave.

But how many dragons had heard his roaring claim upon this "Mount Nevermind?" And what stories might the little gadflies spread about his retreat from their caves? How far would word travel, that Pyrothraxus the Red had tucked tail and flown the nest? Was he not Pyrothraxus the Magnificent? Pyrothraxus the Unvanquished? Pyrothraxus, master of all he surveys and desires?

Yes!

To leave now would be to admit defeat in the face of a puny adversary. He could bear all the teeth of all the dragons of all the world of all time and laugh, but the scorn of wyrmlings as he slunk from the holdings of unworthy, scrawny bipeds was cold, wet ruin to his heart. He must not give up this mountain, this island, this kingdom of his! He must never yield so much as a dew claw's width to the mightiest Knight of Solamnia, let alone a rabble of wag-tongued minikins! No! He would never leave!

Pyrothraxus gingerly drew himself up and rejoiced at the return of his senses. It must have been the headiness of his newly absorbed magic (and, of course, that awful headache) that temporarily robbed him of his brilliance. Why, he was omnipotence itself, after all. "Wonderful" was much too short a word, "splendid" too common on the tongue, "superb" too offensive to the truth! He was *Pyrothraxus*, and that was all in all.

The dragon's course was plain: He would simply have to find his way into the heart of these gnomes' territory and snuff them all... but first, he *had* to sleep, if only for a few hours. Certainly the

little troublemakers would think long and hard before they came snooping around again, so he obviously had the time. A little peace and quiet now, a little carnage and mayhem later, and he'd be a new wyrm, so Pyrothraxus settled back to his side and cradled his belly wounds. He pulled his tail up and wrapped it around his body, then gently laid his head upon it for a pillow.

"Ahh," he sighed. "Sweet, sweet sleep..."

"Heave to, boys, and keep it *quiet*, mind you!" snapped a voice in the distant darkness, just as the dragon was beginning to snore. "That's it. Careful not to drop it!"

The grunting march of a host of bodies crept into Pyrothraxus's listing ears. Still, he stubbornly clung to his slumber, vainly trying to convince himself that he was not hearing anything, and almost succeeded. He was just about to slip into a deep sleep when somewhere in the caves, not far below, the tumultuous din of something wooden under construction began to rattle and bang through his tender brain. Pyrothraxus's scarlet eyelids retracted, his eyes rolled down, and the slitted irises fully widened in the utter blackness.

"What! Are you back again?" he growled ominously through the tunnels, and the hammering halted.

"I think it's awake," muttered a gravelly voice in the void.

"Shh! Shh! Shh! Shh! Shh! Shh! Shh! Shh!" hissed a cluster of others. There was a moment of dead silence... then the banging resumed, furiously.

That was it; they were fried lemmings now! Pyrothraxus uncoiled and slithered down the sinking shaft, toward the despicable little nuisances beyond. The way divided so he sniffed at each passage, but both were scented with the gassy reek of gnomes. Furthermore, the head-splitting hammering and sawing down there echoed through every corner and cubbyhole, confusing and further enraging him. Pyrothraxus made an arbitrary choice and followed it. Immediately the path fragmented again, and again and again, until the dragon could only resolve to take the low road at every turn.

As he drew closer to the din, the tunnels grew narrower, impeding his progress, so he reached into his precious reserve of magical power and conjured a blanket of energy that wrapped about his body, and he began to shrink. Soon he had diminished to about four times the height of a gnome as he stood on all four feet, and he began to descend again. Within the cloak of arcane power, his body tingled pleasantly — it felt good to use magic, and Pyrothraxus fleetingly yearned for the past Age, when magic was abundant. Now he crept easily along the cavern floor and down its steepening pitch, toward the noisy swarm beyond.



Abruptly, the shaft turned vertical and opened on the ceiling of a vast volcano-carved chamber of shiny obsidian and fire-hardened granite. Pyrothraxus clung easily to deep faults in the glassy walls. He hung upside down, stuck his head through the hole, and looked about. On the floor, several hundred feet below, in the light of dozens of torches on tripods, a host of gnomes were putting the finishing touches on a huge tangle of scaffolding, ropes, wheels, pulleys, levers, poles, hinges, counterweights, hatches, frames, gutters, slides, teeter-totters, nets, gears, crates, and a colossal metal disk that must have required a hundred gnomes to lift it, let alone carry it! Pyrothraxus was dumbfounded by the structure's dimensions and dizzying complexity, but he was even more flabbergasted by the speed at which they had erected it.

"What? . . ." he blurted, in spite of his plan to attack with surprise. Below, the gnomes looked up and pointed, inexplicably crying to each other as if they had just spotted a vein of diamonds.

"What, indeed!" answered a sinewy old coot among them. "Allow me to explain! We are very *intelligent people*, your dragonship. We know when we have offended, and we are known for our *offense to offense* (if you will), so we do not wish to disturb you if you do not wish to be disturbed, so we have brought you a *doorbell* so you will know when we are stopping by for a chat and will have the opportunity to invite us in! I have personally —"

"A doorbell?" interrupted Pyrothraxus, focusing upon the speaker, a blue-clad termite with a nose twice as long as his face. "A *doorbell*?"

"Precisely, precisely, a doorbell! I invented it years ago but never dreamed I would have the chance to use it. Do you want to know what makes it different from all the rest of the doorbells out there? The *explosive power*. That's a touch of class! And now, allow me to demonstrate."

Pyrothraxus's eyes widened, zooming in upon the convoluted structure, as the little man vigorously tugged at a rope before him. A web of spring-loaded pulleys of myriad sizes spun back and forth as he yanked, translating the small yanks into long draws. The rope's opposite end activated a gigantic pendulum, which swung ever more prodigiously while the gnome pulled, until its tip gingerly knocked a large, black, smooth sphere from a tee, whereupon the ball rolled down a long, spiraled track — complete with several jumps and a loop-the-loop — and ultimately fell with a splash into a huge barrel of water. A thick wave slopped over the barrel's rim and sloshed to the floor, where a cat sat in a cage, fastidiously bathing itself.

Upon being doused with water, the cat yowled loudly and indignantly, which frightened the heart out of a mouse in another cage nearby. The floor of the rodent's pen proved to be a treadmill lined with chunks of flint, which rapidly struck against a block of steel underneath as the mouse ran in terror, causing sparks to fly hither and yon.

Pyrothraxus squinted at the little fire, able to detect with his keen eyes the ignition and flash of a piece of twine, which burned in hissing spurts toward the tail of a long, heavy-nosed iron rod that lay in an upward-angled tray. With a flare and a flash, the tail of the baton burst to life and shot it through the air with a streak of brilliance. The projectile sailed across the wide, empty space in a long, graceful arc — all heads, including Pyrothraxus's, turned in unison to watch it in flight — and finally smashed squarely into the great metal disk, now hanging from hastily erected uprights, which produced an astounding, low-pitched *bo-o-o-o-o-ong-g-g-g*. An ecstatic cheer went up from the floor.

The resonant toll of the doorbell smashed through Pyrothraxus's sensitive head like a blacksmith's sledge and then shivered through the mountain overhead. With a wince, the great red roared, enraged, abruptly stifling the celebrating gnomes. "Death upon all of you, all of you!" he screamed. "You have taxed the exalted Pyrothraxus beyond endurance!" He paused momentarily, to enjoy their unfolding terror before swooping in for the massacre — and at that moment perceived a queer rumbling behind him.

High above, the mountainous walls of the volcano were crumbling and coming down. "Avalanche!" screamed dozens of gnomes, and the cavern below dissolved into chaos.

Behind and above Pyrothraxus, the thunderous flow smashed through the cavern entrance, rushing to fill the empty space, and drove onward, blasting free even more stone as it descended through the caves, toward the dragon, who presently clung inverted to a wall in its path. Quickly Pyrothraxus released his hold and dropped from the opening, yet even as he flipped over and got his feet under him, a column of falling scree spouted from the aperture and nailed him squarely in the head!

Pyrothraxus fell as if he were a bag of rocks, himself. He crashed through the scaffolding of the doorbell, while dozens of gnomes scattered madly to make room for him, and the whole mess collapsed on top of him. Mercifully, the avalanche choked to a sudden halt as larger boulders clogged the tunnels above, but a rain of hefty rubble clattered against the lumber piled over Pyrothraxus's body, sending up a dense cloud of dust. The

rumbling faded to silence, and for a few moments there was utter stillness in the cavern.

Pyrothraxus burst through the pile of wreckage, sat up, and coughed with a cloud of soot. He seized his poor, aching head and cradled it as it pounded more violently than ever. Even worse, seething indignation swelled in his plated breast, sorely aggravated by frustration he had never known and humiliation he dreaded worse than death.

"I am Pyrothraxus the Great!" he bellowed to the cavern, expecting to incite a riot, yet there were no gnomes in sight. "I am mighty!" he insisted anyway. "I will not be defeated by a swarm of bloated insects! You will not evict Pyrothraxus! You will not make Pyrothraxus the butt of *dragonmirth*! I am coming for you, coming for you all!"

The great red squinted at the cavern around him and sniffed at the air. Across the uneven, faceted black floor, strewn with rubble, lay a large, natural arch whose base had obviously been paved flat. He climbed to his feet and extracted himself from the remains of the doorbell, then crossed to the arch and looked in, discovering a wide thoroughway that spiraled downward and out of sight. Distant, gnomish cacophony wafted up to his forward-pricked ears, and he ground his teeth in anticipation. Pyrothraxus fully elongated his body and wormed his way into the tunnel, then sped down, down, down to the heart of the old volcano. Along the way, the wrathful beast overtook gnome after gnome, but he simply crushed them with a snarl as he rushed onward, seeking the population center at the bottom.

At last, Pyrothraxus found the bottom of the shaft and burst into the grand cavern at the base of Mount Nevermind. He drew up on his haunches, wheeled around in search of his first target — and froze, gawking at the ludicrous, impossible spectacle before him: The ceiling of this sub-mountainous chamber rose out of sight, lost in a tangle of plat-forms, chains, ropes, and netting that filled the space — occasionally streaked with flying gnomes in hooded suits that sheathed them from head to toe! Tumbling through the air like rotten eggs tossed from a nest, the gray-wrapped little people sailed along wobbling arcs, only to land upon some aerial platform or plummet into expansive nets (most of the time). Pyrothraxus sighted back along the flight path of one and discovered that they were actually launching themselves with bizarre catapults!

"What...?"

"W-what, indeed!" answered a nearby gnome, who had been locked in immobile terror when the

dragon rushed in. (Apparently a question was the only thing needed to get these flap-jaws started.) "W-w-w-we're testing our flying suits, mighty d-d-d-d-dragon sir," he stuttered, then brightened. "And judging by how often the testers overshoot their targets, I believe we can declare success!"

The gnome cast down his eyes and took a step closer, adopting a fawning tone of voice. "Now it will be easier than ever to visit and talk with you, mighty dragon sir! You fly, don't you? As long as you're here, would you mind answering a few questions about making safe landings? It's the one part of the equation we haven't worked out yet."

The gnome began to probe him with inquiries, but Pyrothraxus had stopped listening. Could it be that these creatures were actually trying to find ways to spend more time with him? The very idea threatened to unhinge him completely. For a moment, he considered the possibility that he had fallen asleep the first time he laid down, and this was all some magic-driven nightmare. This scene could not be happening to him: Pyrothraxus the Great, Pyrothraxus the Magnificent, Pyrothraxus the Undaunted; Pyrothraxus, Pyrothraxus, Pyrothraxus! . . .

At that moment, a pair of obese gnomes, unusually confident that their flying suits were fully functional, decided to buzz on over and say hello. They leaped upon a single *gnomeflinger*, barked out orders to adjust the trajectory, and hit the trigger. The catapult uncoiled smoothly, launching them skyward toward Pyrothraxus, who presently was absorbed in his own thoughts. Too late, the gnomes realized that they had not yet incorporated "course alterations" into the suits' workings. Together they descended, flailing and screaming madly, and together they tumbled down upon — of course — the dragon's poor head. Pyrothraxus looked up only in time to receive an elbow directly between the eyes, and he went down like a weakling — glass-jawed and feather-horned.

"Excuse me! I was talking to the dragon!" protested the nearby researcher. The fat fliers rolled to their feet, wrung their hands as they looked down upon their reptilian guest, and began to argue with each other over who's fault it was.

Pyrothraxus the Red arose like a blood storm, in agony beyond sanity and completely bereft of so much as a fang's tip of control over himself. He became a thing solely driven by instinct, and that instinct commanded him to kill, to breathe fire! The dragon reared, drew wind, and then expelled conflagration upon the nearest moving things: the two fat gnomes. They had no chance to run, so they fell to the floor and curled up helplessly. Flames

washed over them and blotted them from sight, but when Pyrothraxus interrupted his attack to inhale, the flying gnomes untucked and looked at each other! Pyrothraxus held his breath momentarily, coherent enough to understand that breathed-on gnomes should *not* be moving anymore, and then belched fire at them again. The flames died away, and despite considerable charring, the little vermin seemed to be fine!

"The suits!" they squealed, leaping to their feet. "The flying suits are flameproof! Breathe on us again, sir dragon! Breathe on us again!"

The room began to spin around Pyrothraxus as he was surrounded by throngs of creatures in hooded suits who all chanted, "Breathe on us, breathe on us!" He howled insanely and responded to their demands, blowing fire in every direction again and again, staring at them from somewhere outside himself as they leaped up and down and begged to be breathed upon once more. Their voices blended into an echoing clamor of squeaky voices, relentlessly shouting, "Breathe! Breathe!" and he complied mindlessly.

Pyrothraxus reeled drunkenly, exhausting his breath weapon, and was about to collapse when a voice somewhere parted the general chant with the words, "*Don't breathe over here! Don't breathe over here...*" Desperate to accomplish just one thing that would displease anyone besides himself, he leaned in that direction and expelled his last gout of flames, just as he heard the words, "... this is explosives storage!"

The blast went off in Pyrothraxus's face.

Had the dragon not been red, the fire ball would surely have incinerated him on the spot. On the other hand, red dragons are not immune to the concussion of an explosion, so Pyrothraxus was cast across the great chamber like a gnome on a *flinger*. Meanwhile, the initial blast touched off another one, deeper underground, roughly jolting the cavern, and that in turn was answered by a quake that shook the mountain to its roots.

The city began to shudder and fall apart. Great slabs of stone broke free of the walls and ceiling, and smashed to the floor of the cave, dangerously near the dragon. Gnomes began to run in all directions, some of them scrambling right over Pyrothraxus, on their way along the shortest distance between two points. Huge platforms overhead listed and dumped their contents, creating a rain of trinkets and gizmos around the prostrate wyrm, followed by falling rocks.

Now, Pyrothraxus clung desperately to consciousness, certain that he would never waken again if he gave in to his impulse to sleep right

now. Feeling death's grip on his tail, he shut his eyes tight and concentrated with all his might on summoning up magic. The effort shot slicing pain through his head as he mentally ripped open his reserves of magical essence and willed a shield to solidify above him.

As soon as some feeling returned to his limbs, he labored to his feet and staggered for the exit by which most of the gnomes had fled. Meanwhile, the city crashed around him as he tripped along the quaking ground. His magical shield moved with him, but each blow of falling debris upon it drained the barrier and sent piercing shock waves through Pyrothraxus's battered skull. At last he cleared the grand cavern and struggled along a winding corridor. Light appeared ahead, so he bore down and heaved himself toward it, even as the tunnel collapsed at his haunches.

The brightness of a new morning stung his eyes and inflamed his headache to yet new torment as Pyrothraxus broke free of Mount Nevermind. At the lip of the exit he stumbled over his own feet, fell, and rolled down a short slope which ended in a sheer drop-off. The Great Dragon plunged headlong into a grove of trees, cracked his way through the thick branches, and eventually came to a blunt stop in a gigantic clump of thorn bushes. As he lay there with the wind knocked from him, each scale of his tubular body cried out to him, fruitlessly striving to distract him, even for an instant, from the leaden tolling in his skull.

One last explosion shook the island, and a thick spout of yellowish ash sprayed skyward beyond the mountain ridge. Pyrothraxus gazed through blurred vision at the rising plume of smoke and then squinted against the hail spray of dirt and stones that pelted him in the wake of the eruption. The sharp odor of sulfur filled his nostrils.

Perhaps the volcano was not as extinct as it seemed....

In the forest around him, gnomish cries went up, and Pyrothraxus chuckled despite his pain. The dismay of the runty survivors, just now realizing they were completely homeless, was victory sweeter than destroying a rival dragon. "Thus, Mount Nevermind becomes the lair of Pyrothraxus the Red," he concluded.

But something was not quite right. Those voices sounded — somehow — happy! He raised his head and craned his ears forward, seeking to hear them more clearly.

"At last! At last!" he heard one yell. "It's a miracle!" shouted another. "Now we finally have an inexhaustible source of heat!" cried several others.

Continued on page 88



by Keith Strohm

DM: Okay, your party has just returned to the trade city of Baronvea after a successful foray against Fenrik the Wolflord. What are your characters doing?

Thanduz (a priest): Umm. . . is there a temple dedicated to my deity anywhere in the city? I took a nasty bite from Fenrik, and I want to make sure I haven't been inflicted with lycanthropy.

DM (smoothly): Yes there is. You ask around a bit and are told to follow the large street north of Market Square.

Solach (a thief): I'm going to take a stroll into Market Square. Do I see any signs of local guild activity?

DM (rolling dice): Well, you look around the bustling marketplace and manage to spot two nondescript-looking gentlemen stealthily approaching an obviously successful merchant.

Sir Pelthan (interrupting): Never mind about that no-good thief! I'm going to ride out and pay my knightly respects to the Duke of Baronvea; it's been a while since I've seen another Knight of the Star. I also need to talk to him about the strange disappearance of the Knight-General of our order.

DM (hesitantly): Umm... if appears that the duke is out hunting.

Sir Pelthan: Hunting? But the duke's keep is practically surrounded by swampland!

DM: Well, would you believe he was called away on a diplomatic mission?

Sir Pelthan: This is ridiculous! I thought you just said he was hunting?

DM (sheepishly): Dukes are usually pretty busy people, you know.

Play stops as the players begin to grumble about that new collectible card game they've been dying to try.

Unfortunately, nothing spoils a player's enjoyment of the game like a DM who's obviously unprepared, especially

"A" is for NPC

when NPC encounters are involved. In a perfect world, Dungeon Masters have all the time they need consistently to create believable NPCs who live in a complex and engaging campaign world. The real world, however, is far from ideal. School, work, relationships, and the responsibilities of life in general often curtail extensive campaign development.

How, then, can an aspiring Dungeon Master successfully create an array of fully developed NPCs and avoid the embarrassment and confusion of being unprepared? The answer is simple. By paying close attention to the three A's — Appearance, Attitude, and Aspiration — a Dungeon Master can easily develop an important and recurring NPC in mere moments.

Appearance

The first stage of NPC generation is simply to describe how an NPC looks. Appearance includes the NPC's *physical attributes* — from build to hair color — as well as any relevant statistics. It is not usually necessary to provide complete statistics for non-adventuring NPCs. DMs who are pressed for time should fudge these numbers or simply determine those statistics they feel will have the greatest impact on gameplay.

How many times during your travels through many different campaign worlds have you run into a slightly befuddled mage who eventually renders some assistance? That particular NPC has become a stock character in fantasy gaming and literature, so presenting your PCs with yet another kindly old mage will mute the impact of the story you are trying to tell. The stock NPC may even appear as an obvious "flag" to your experienced players: "Oh, a kindly old man in robes. Well, I talk to him for a while to see if he has a wand or other item that will help us deal with the trolls." Instead of an exciting encounter with a unique individual who deepens the storyline, the whole event becomes a transparent facade; the players are thrust out of their adventuring personae and realize that they are Jim, Marlo, and Eugenia, three college students trying to solve a puzzle before the pizza delivery arrives.

If, on the other hand, you tell them that the old mage speaks with a slight rasp and has a pulsating chromatic orb in place of his left eye, you've made that stock NPC much more interesting and memorable. The mage's pulsating orb, and the tale of how he came by it, may even provide an intriguing story hook for a future adventure.

Another element to consider during this stage of NPC generation is the actual *physical location* of the NPC. Where does he live? People are often shaped by their surrounding environment, so why should your NPC be any different? Rough, unsettled territories rarely produce foppish courtiers or errant rogues used to making some easy money. Rather, these harsh environments are often home to those brave of heart and strong of arm. Consider the ruler of a small area located in a frozen waste. It is probable that this ruler has little time for

the niceties of courtly life, since eking an existence from the bitter elements that plague his land, and combating the fierce creatures of the wastes occupy much of his time. This NPC is likely to be an imposing figure, possessing a muscular frame and a squint made permanent from many travels across the sun-reflecting ice.

Other locations may also provide important elements for NPC development. Cities have their dark alleyways and bustling marketplaces, forests and rural areas have their own particular pace of life, and temples have musty vaults and dimly lit libraries. Just about any locale can aid a DM in the creation of an NPC. The key is to imagine the Non-Player Character interacting with the environment. What effect will it have on him physically? Will harsh conditions harden his body? Will these conditions possibly be detrimental to the NPC's health? These are all questions that a DM should ask when creating a Non-Player Character.

Another factor to consider during this phase of NPC development is the character's *profession*. What does he do for a living? Your answer will have a great impact upon the NPC's appearance. It is quite difficult to pick a butcher out of a crowd (provided he is not covered in animal gore), and not every student looks bookish or emaciated, but certain professions do leave telltale marks on its adherents' physical appearance. For instance, a blacksmith is likely to have a well developed upper body, especially his arms, and a heat-reddened face. The aforementioned student may have to squint a bit from reading musty tomes by candlelight.

These physical cues may be more pronounced on those NPCs who choose travel and adventure as a way to make a living. Adventuring is dangerous business, and those brave few who call the road their home more than likely bear a number of scars to prove it. In addition, an NPC's area of expertise will eventually leave its mark upon him. While it is not impossible for a rogue to have a muscular physique much like a warrior, years of training the hands and eye for subtle manipulations and acts of fine coordination leave little time for studying the arts of war and bodily development. Likewise, all mages do not have to resemble the gaunt and physically powerless form of the young Raistlin from the DRAGONLANCE® novels; however, wizards do spend most of their time plumb-

ing the uncharted depths of mystic lore. Such a legacy will remain apparent even on those who have long since left their studies behind. Again, it is important to consider the physical ramifications of an NPC's profession during the initial creation process.

Finally, a DM should consider an NPC's age. Is the NPC enjoying the first flush of youth, or has he long since abandoned those carefree younger days — walking, as it were, in his more “mature” years? Perhaps the NPC teeters on the threshold of senility and doddering old age.

The answers to these questions have a profound impact upon the physical makeup of the NPC as they provide the DM with fuel for description. For example, a DM interested in the development of a memorable old shopkeeper rarely relies on just a simple adjective like “old.” Instead, the DM may describe the wizened crow's feet that flair out like webbing from the sides of the shopkeeper's eyes, or he may concentrate on the slight quaver that marks the shopkeeper's voice. Again, an extremely rigorous attention to detail may be impossible for a time-pressed DM; however, a few moments spent examining the age of a developing NPC can easily yield one or two physical “cues” that make the NPC in question much more memorable.

The Duke of Baronvea revisited

Using the methods discussed in this stage, a DM can quickly generate the Appearance of the (unfortunately) incomplete Duke of Baronvea. The DM knows from the example that the duke resides in a keep surrounded by swampland — a rather hazardous terrain to settle. Furthermore, he knows that the duke is also a knight of some renown. These two simple facts open up a wealth of possibilities for the DM:

His Grace, Duke Willym Lonsold, lord of Baronvea and knight of the realm, enjoyed a noble upbringing immersed in the practical arts of statecraft and warfare. His father, a wealthy baron and knight, sponsored the young lad into the knightly orders. There, Willym received further training in the noble arts of war. Soon, the gifted squire received his knightly spurs and began a long adventuring career. Willym's long and tireless pursuit of justice, as well as his heroic deeds, did not go unnoticed.

Several years ago, the king elevated Sir Willym to the Dukedom, granting him as his

fief the growing trade city of Baronvea, as well as all the lands within a week's ride from the city. Duke Willym then set about clearing his lands of dangerous beasts and fierce monsters that would imperil his subjects. Under his guidance, the city of Baronvea has prospered.

The road to knighthood is an involved one indeed, requiring many years of training and preparation. Furthermore, Sir Willym must have adventured for a while in order to reach at least 9th level — the minimum level required before a fighter may gain followers. Therefore, we can assume that Willym is no longer a young man. Finally, such intense training and obviously dangerous adventuring experiences must have left their marks on the knight. All of these factors provide ample inspiration for the DM's continued character generation:

Although no longer in his fighting prime, Duke Willym still remains a fierce fighter. His fall, muscular body has not run to fat like so many other rich nobles; he keeps himself in shape by accompanying his men-at-arms on some dangerous expeditions. Willym has thick graying hair which he wears long, and a well trimmed salt and pepper beard. A long scar, reputedly given to Willym by a dying red dragon, runs across his often furrowed brow. The duke never goes anywhere without Krystom, his sun blade +2.

Attitude

Attitude is the second stage in NPC generation; it covers not only an NPC's personality but his entire worldview as well. How does the NPC view himself in relation to others? Does he have any strong loves or hates? What, if anything, does he believe in? Is there anything that truly frightens or horrifies this NPC? Does he have any strange quirks or idiosyncracies? These are all questions that should be asked when developing this aspect of your NPC.

The DUNGEON MASTER® Guide provides a highly useful table for generating NPC personalities which offers ideal assistance to overworked DMs. Such game aids can often become a crutch, however. Besides introducing the all-too-capricious effects of chance into campaign creation (imagine the dice determining that our noble and courageous Duke of Baronvea was actually a craven, immoral, lying scoundrel), most tables generate the “what,” not the “why,” offering a merely one- or two-dimen-

sional “quick fix” to questions of campaign creation.

A random table may determine that an NPC displays laconic tendencies, but the player lacks any sort of clue as to why he acts laconically. It is very difficult to role-play a believable NPC without any sort of insight into his personality.

Alignment is a key factor in determining an NPC's personality and ideology. Once the DM decides on the alignment of a particular NPC, it provides him with a developmental framework on which to build a personality of some depth. This does not mean that alignment automatically determines an NPC's personality. Experienced gamers know that alignment is not a straightjacket. Lawful Good characters are not always kind and helpful people willing to risk their lives to aid an adventuring group; rather, they can sometimes come across as arrogant, churlish, and petty. Likewise, Chaotic Evil NPCs do not always manifest themselves as the latest incarnation of pure evil; sometimes these individuals can be gentle and even kind.

The ambiguities found within alignment groups provide the DM with a great deal of freedom to shape an NPC's personality without resorting to tired stereotypes. For example, a DM knows that a Chaotic Good NPC will in some way value personal freedom and the concept of the individual over highly developed and highly rigid concepts and structures that promote “the good of the many.” This may manifest itself in a myriad of different ways. The NPC may demonstrate nothing but contempt for anything and anyone that represents or supports rigid concepts of Law, or he may quietly tolerate a perceived injustice, all the while silently working towards its eventual abolishment. Perhaps the NPC is just plain lazy and does not wish to be bothered by “civic responsibility” and duty. The list of possibilities extends as far as the imagination of the DM.

When examining alignment in relation to an NPC's personality, it is important to return to that character's occupation. Certain professions strengthen and support alignment tendencies. For example, a cleric NPC will probably involve himself more deeply in the struggle between good and evil. If this cleric serves the powers of Law and Goodness, he may be more intolerant of chaos or evil. Holy fighters, such as paladins and all those who ally themselves with temples and deities, naturally take

matters of alignment very seriously. Even certain wizard and rogue kits may strengthen the degree to which alignment shapes the development of an NPC's personality.

Once the DM creates an initial framework, he can begin to flesh out the NPC's personality. Does the Non-Player Character have any strong love or hatred for particular individuals, creatures, or issues? Perhaps the Chaotic Good merchant in your campaign despises the high taxes that are levied to support the overly institutionalized (from his perspective) bureaucracy of the city. Player characters who interact with the merchant during any sort of official business (a mission or quest undertaken on behalf of the government, for instance) may experience a rather frosty reception. On the other hand, an otherwise unfriendly Neutral woodsman with a fascination for the “faerie-folk” might happily divulge some much needed information if approached by an elven PC.

The DM should also explore other areas of the NPC's personality, such as the existence of any deep seated fears or intense phobias. In the hands of an imaginative DM, these factors not only add realism and depth to an NPC, they also influence the development of personality, and color the NPC's interactions.

Consider the affect that a phobia of heights might have on a fierce and proud warrior. Will he try to hide it in an effort to maintain his dignity and reputation? Does the proud fighter carry around deep-rooted feelings of shame? How will he react to a group of PCs who try to enlist him for a dangerous quest that will lead to the top of an immense mountain. Will the warrior act defensive? Will he greet the PCs warmly or belligerently? The answers to these questions will profoundly shape the NPC's personality.

A DM should also consider whether or not a particular NPC possesses any idiosyncracies. Adding some strange habits or mannerisms to an NPC definitely brings him to life in a very effective way. Ideally, these idiosyncracies should stem from particular elements found in other areas of the NPC's development. Perhaps the phobic fighter discussed above refuses to travel anywhere without wearing a brightly colored (and easily detectable) fez-like hat which he believes to be permanently enchanted with a *feather fall* spell. The scope and range of these strange habits

is practically limitless. It is important, however, to include them sparingly in any campaign.

A constant array of twitchy, quirky, and bizarre NPCs dampens their overall effect on players.

Duke Willym — a case study

The duke, besides his granted membership in an organized and hierarchical government, also belongs to a strictly regimented society of warriors dedicated to the defense of the weak and helpless against the cruel forces of evil. The DM decides that these factors dictate the duke's alignment as lawful good, then continues:

The Duke of Baronvea believes strongly in the principles of justice and in the wisdom of structured government. Nobles have a sacred duty to protect and fairly rule all who dwell within their lands. Likewise, serfs, citizens, and vassals have an obligation to obey and serve their liege. In the duke's view, the fulfillment of these duties represents the very fabric of a just society.

As a Knight of the Star and a devout follower of Palamabron, god of justice, Duke Willym has little tolerance for the injustices that stem from selfishness and greed. His judgments are swift, and his justice is often harsh. Despite this, the duke's vast experience adventuring in distant lands has tempered the steel of his righteousness with compassion. All good-hearted people who gain audience with Willym are treated with warmth and the courtesy that befits their station.

Unbeknownst to most of his subjects, Duke Willym's last quest ended in tragedy. A fierce encounter with the red dragon, Khaerinoth, left his entire party dead. Willym slew the dragon by himself in one-on-one combat; the battle, however, left his brow, and his psyche, deeply scarred. Duke Willym is now absolutely paranoid about all things draconic; he is convinced that the offspring of Khaerinoth will hunt him down. No matter what season, Willym sends a cadre of men across his lands on “dragon watch.” He may even hire the player characters to track down a draconic beast which he believes “lurks even now in the dank swamp around my castle.” Any attempt to dissuade him of his paranoid beliefs will be met with fierce denial and possibly anger.

Aspiration

This third and final stage of development deals primarily with the NPC's motivations, dreams, plans, and desires. In many respects, the outcome of this third section will grow naturally from the

information developed in the first two stages of generation. By now, the DM should know the NPC's appearance, personality, and basic philosophy; all other considerations of the Non Player Characters aspirations must remain consistent with that basic information. It would not make sense for a faithful priest of a dwarven war god to champion a peace treaty with a large community of derro. Likewise, it is extremely unlikely that the noble and just Duke of Baronvea would involve himself in a plot to overthrow a fair and effective ruler.

This required consistency actually renders the final stage of NPC generation fairly straightforward. The DM need only do two things to develop the NPC's aspirations. First, the DM should consider the ultimate role that the NPC will play in the campaign. Is he a featured villain for an adventure or series of adventures? Perhaps the NPC acts as a story hook or introduces an important element or theme into the campaign? Maybe he is merely meant to add color to a scene or particular encounter? Clearly identifying an NPC's role will go a long way towards developing their aspirations, and it just might save the harried DM some time. After all, it is hardly necessary to create an elaborate set of motivations for a "one-shot" NPC — no matter how prominent he figures in a particular adventure.

Once the NPC's role is clearly identified, the DM should re-examine the results of the first two stages of character development. Areas like age, location, occupation, alignment, and especially strong loves, fears, and hates, all affect the development of an NPC's motivation.

Consider, once again, the example of the CG merchant. His hatred for the "unjustly" high taxes of the tyrannical city government has already been developed. The DM might pursue this aspect of the merchant's personality when developing his aspirations. Perhaps the merchant plots the downfall of the city government and plans to hire some PCs to extract damaging personal information about members of the ruling council. Or maybe he hopes to recover his financial tax losses by overcharging on some or all of his goods. The DM can easily expand this initial development by re-examining some other components of the NPC's appearance or attitude; once again, the permutations are practically limitless.

Noble ambitions

The Dungeon Master, realizing that Sir Pelthan's player is extremely excited about the disappearance of the Knight General of the Star, decides to expand that sub-plot to include the Duke of Baronvea. He then takes a look back at the other stages of the duke's development to see if there might be something he can use:

Despite Duke Willym's fierce loyalty to the king, the proud and noble warrior is not exactly happy with the primitive (and smelly) location of his castle. The Swampland of Kador is not a suitable residence for the "Lion of Lonsold." Secretly, Willym hopes that the king will once again recognize his superior accomplishments and grant him more hospitable lands upon which to rule.

The recent disappearance of Lord Brion, Knight-General of the Star, could be the opportunity Willym has been seeking. Lord

Brion left several months ago on a quest to destroy Dornuea, the Witch-Queen of Gwyrth. He should have returned at least two weeks ago; it is probable that the witch's enchantments proved too great for the aging knight. This leaves the Knights of the Star without a strong leader. If Willym could somehow recover Clarion, the Knight-Generals traditional sword, and defeat Dornuea, he would be elevated to lead the knights. Duke Willym would then be granted rulership of Thardor Keep, a magnificent militant castle located to the north of Baronvea. Willym could then appoint his nephew, Geoffrey, to rule the lands around the Kador Swamplands in his name.

These thoughts have been running through Willym's head for some time now, and he will do everything within the bounds of honor and justice to see them come to fruition.

NPCs are the ultimate tools for a DM; they are often the means through which he guides, confounds, amuses, and rewards his players. In addition, NPCs add depth and flavor (always valuable in a continuing campaign) to any setting. It is easy to see, then, why such important elements must be more than just bland, "cardboard cutout" figures.

An examination of the three A's — Appearance, Attitude, and Aspiration — offers the DM a quick and effective way to create memorable, three-dimensional NPCs.



Keith Strohm is a game editor at TSR, Inc. He is a wonderful person and hopes one day to effect world peace.

Fiction

Continued from page 84

Excitement turned to glee, and glee to euphoria.

Pyrothraxus let his head fall limply back, banging it against a boulder, which extracted a clipped "Ow!" from him. He sighed dejectedly. Let them come and slay him now; he was done.

Suddenly, the great red wyrm decided he would go to sleep right there, without moving a single claw. Maybe the gnomes would even forget about him for awhile. They had their stinking power source, after all, and there was one heck of a cleanup in front of them if they planned to stick around (and somehow he knew they would). Besides, they couldn't see him down here, lying in these ("Ow!") bushes. Definitely, the time

and place of rest had come. His eyes glazed over and eased shut, and his breathing slowed to an easy, rhythmic pace.

Through the haze of fast-approaching, blissful sleep, his keen ears instinctively pricked and harkened to the whispery buzz of a half-dozen perky little voices, drawing near...



David Wise is director of creative services at TSR, Inc. He lives in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, with his wife and her cat, a worthy and almost gnomelike adversary.

Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 51347, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge, CB1 3LB, U.K. You can also e-mail questions to tsrsage@aol.com. We are no longer able to make personal replies. Please send no SASEs with your question. SASEs are being returned with copies of the writer's guidelines.

Join the Sage for a look into the inner workings of a few spells from the AD&D® 2nd Edition game and the particulars of some optional rules.

I run a FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign. Recently, the PCs discovered and explored an ancient illusionist's crypt. Within, they found more than 80 stone tablets that comprised the dead illusionists' spell books. The tablets were too heavy to move, so the party came back later and did rubbings of the tablets. All the spells were written in the secret language of illusionists. From what I can gather from the FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set, this language possesses some dweomer. My impression is that it is resistant to *comprehend languages* and similar spells, and thus unreadable to all but actual specialty wizard illusionists. I would think that a secret language of wizards would not be susceptible to something as simple as this or other low-level spells. Is this correct?

The 1st-level wizard spell *comprehend languages* cannot decipher magical writing or magically warded writing (see spell description, *Player's Handbook*, Appendix 3, page 172). Insofar as Ruthlek (the secret script used by illusionists in the FORGOTTEN REALMS world) is "dweomer guarded," a character using *comprehend languages* should not be able to read it. A *read magic* spell, however, does allow characters to read Ruthlek.

On the other hand, copying spell books is a difficult process that takes time (one to two days of work per level of the spell being copied) and materials of the highest quality. Simple tracings or rubbings cannot duplicate a spell book.

The DM™ Option: High-Level Campaigns book said mortals can go no higher than 30th level. Do phaerimm (of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting) really have wizard abilities to 40th level?

While mortals hit their limit when they reach 30th level, the phaerimm aren't necessarily cut from the same cloth as normal mortals are. The upcoming Arcane Age products provides the definitive answer to your question.

The High-Level Campaigns book states on page 144 that monsters have no THAC0 limits, but their THAC0 table stops at 16+ Hit Dice. Can they improve past the 16+ Hit Dice level?

Yes. Just extend the progression from Table 39 of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*.

Monsters with 17 or 18 hit dice have THAC0s of 3, monsters with 19 or 20 hit dice have THAC0s of 1, monsters with 21 or 22 hit dice have THAC0s of -1, and so on. Note that the monster still misses if it rolls a 1 on its attack die, no matter what its THAC0 is.

The High-Level Campaigns book did not show any special abilities gained by druids after 20th level. Do they still gain abilities to travel to the plane of Shadow, alternate worlds, and the Outlands (Concordant Opposition) from 21st to 23rd level?

You're referring, I assume, to the extra abilities granted to the highest level hierophant druids in the old *Unearthed Arcana* tome. When I wrote *High-Level Campaigns*, I hadn't intended to allow druids the extra planar access or elemental summoning abilities they gained in *Unearthed Arcana*. Druids do receive all the abilities listed in *High-Level Campaigns* for priests of levels 20 and up, except for improved undead turning at 21st level. If you like, you can replace improved undead turning with the power to enter the para-elemental planes.

Is it possible to cast a true dweomer (from the High Level Campaigns book) whose final difficulty rating is more than 100?

No. To cast a true dweomer, a character has to complete preparations for the spell and roll the final difficulty num-



ber or higher on 1d100. Obviously, if the spell's final difficulty is more than 100, the spell can't be cast (because you can't roll more than 100 on 1d100). Currently, there is no skill or item in the game that grants characters bonuses to difficulty rolls, but the spell caster can modify the spell by adding special conditions and material components that reduce the difficulty number.

Using material components and special conditions to reduce a spell's difficulty has some limits, as explained on pages 130 through 133. If the caster can't provide enough conditions and components to lower the final difficulty to 100 or less, he can double the spell's preparation time and reduce the spell's final difficulty by half. If that still doesn't do the trick, the caster has to go back to the drawing board and redesign the spell or go looking for enough exotic spell components to get the difficulty down to a workable number; there's no limit to the number of exotic material components used in a true dweomer.

Casting true dweomers requires patience, dedication, and imagination from both the player and the DM. A powerful true dweomer could take years of game time to complete as the caster scours the land for components. If either the DM or player doesn't feel up to it, it's best not to use true dweomers at all.

I have been wondering, can a dragon use its breath weapon if its mouth is shut? What if someone was in the dragon's mouth? How much damage would the person suffer? How much would the dragon suffer?

Whether any monster can use a breath weapon with its mouth shut is entirely up to the DM. Common sense suggests that a dragon (or any other creature with a breath attack) would have to open its jaws at least a little to loose a breath weapon. But, it is also reasonable to assume that a creature can use its breath weapon if it can breathe. It doesn't matter which option you choose, so long as you use it consistently.

Note that just tying a creature's mouth shut probably won't guarantee that it can't use its breath weapon, it might break the bonds or work them loose and blast away when its captor least expects it.

In any case, a creature with its mouth clamped shut suffers no ill effects when it tries to loose a breath weapon.

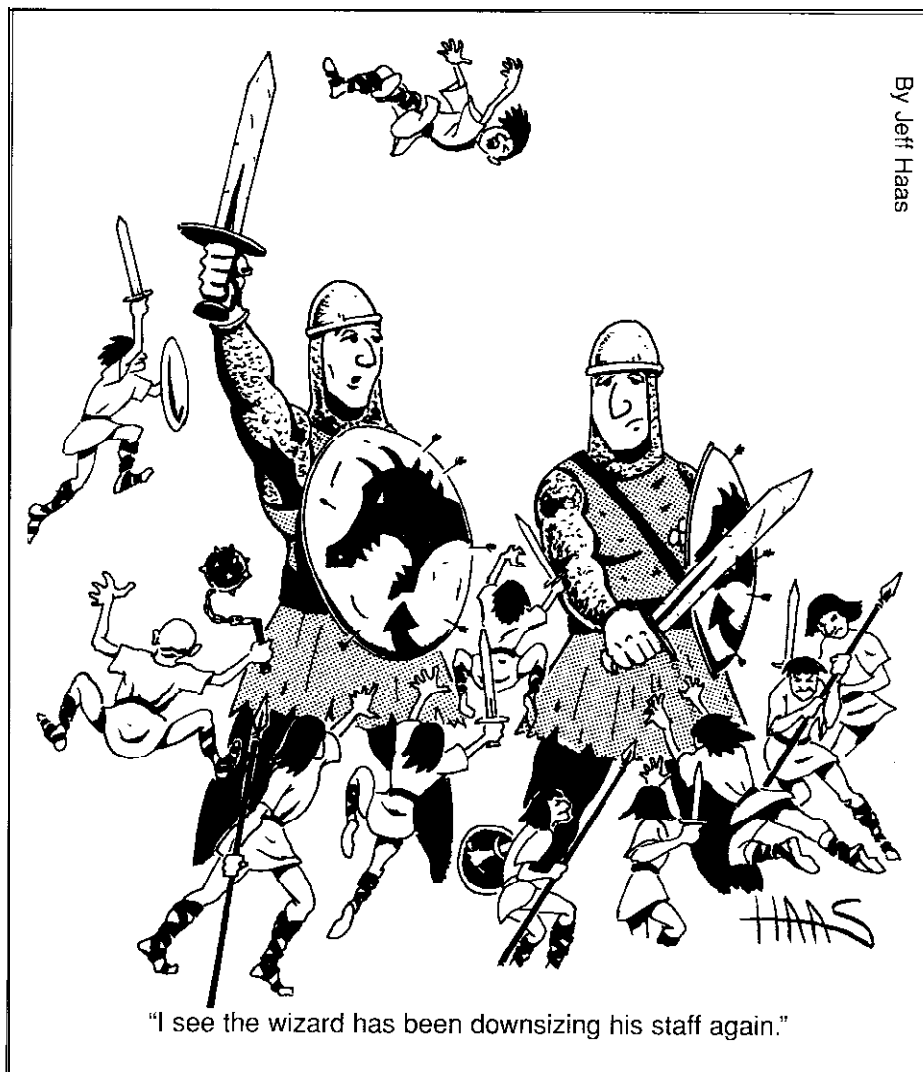
A creature loses all Dexterity adjustments to saving throws and suffer a -4 saving throw penalty if it's unfortunate enough to be stuck in a dragon's or other monster's mouth when the monster uses a breath weapon. A creature stuck in a monster's mouth never blocks a breath weapon; the breath affects the stuck creature and fills its normal area of effect, too.

Does the +1 bonus to damage from the *chant* and *prayer* spells apply to damage that spells inflict? If so, does the bonus apply to each die of damage or to the whole total?

The damage bonuses or penalties apply to any attacks the spell recipients make, including spell attacks. The bonus or penalty applies to the damage roll, not to each die used in the roll. If an attack, such as a *fireball* spell, affects multiple creatures at once, the bonus or penalty is applied once to the damage roll. If an attack is split up so that it affects several creatures individually, such as a *magic missile* spell, the bonus or penalty is applied to the damage each creature receives. Attacks that inflict no damage aren't subject to the damage bonus or penalty. Damage that results indirectly from an attack is not subject to the bonus or penalty. For example, if someone pushes a creature off a cliff or into a fire, the resulting fall or burn damage is not affected. The attack was the push, which inflicted no damage.

The 8th-level wizard spell *spell engine* from the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting absorbs spell energy from any spell or spell-like effects cast in its area. The spell description says symbols, glyphs, and abjuration spells already operating in the engine's area when it activates are not neutralized. This implies that other spells in the area are. For instance, a wall of force (an evocation spell), would be negated if a spell engine activates in its area. Is that correct?

Yes, that's correct. Note that a spell is "already operating" if it is cast outside the spell engine's area of effect and then brought into the area. For example, an



"I see the wizard has been downsizing his staff again."

By Jeff Haas

antimagic shell created outside the *spell engine's* area and then moved so that its radius overlaps the *spell engine's* area is not neutralized. Instead it temporarily negates the *spell engine's* effects within the area of overlap. If the *antimagic shell's* area of effect overlaps the *spell engine's* area at the time of casting, however, the *antimagic shell* is negated; the *spell engine* prevents the *shell* from forming. Note that only symbols, glyphs, and abjuration spells have this property. Other mobile spells end when brought within a *spell engine's* area. Note also that a *dispel true dweomer* (from the High-Level Campaigns book) can destroy a *spell engine*.

What sort of limits apply to the *contingency* spell? Does *contingency* activate another spell only once? Or does a *contingency* activate a spell an unlimited number of times while the *contingency* duration (one day per caster level) lasts? If the latter is true, one might cast *contingency* and designate an *armor* spell as the contingent effect with the trigger being "whenever the *armor* spell currently protecting me runs out." The *contingency* caster would get continuous armor protection for many days, right? What kind of triggers can the *contingency* caster specify? Can he bring a *contingent* spell into being just by snapping his fingers? Also, does the caster's situation have any effect on a *contingent* spell? For example, if the caster is bound and gagged when the trigger occurs, does the contingent effect still occur?

The *contingency* spell must be cast simultaneously with one other spell. The companion spell is essentially precast and takes effect only when the *contingency* triggers it. Once the companion spell is triggered, the whole spell complex ends. The caster cannot load multiple spells into the *contingency* nor can he add new spells once the original spell has been triggered. If the caster wants to duplicate a particular effect, he must cast the *contingency* and the companion spell all over again (but note that a character can have only one *contingency* operating at a time). The *contingency* spell's duration really should read "one day per caster level or until triggered."

The condition that triggers the *contingency* can be just about anything the caster can imagine, but it has to be fairly simple. Generally, it must be a single event or condition, not a series of things. When the DM decides a *contingency*

might fail, he is free to decide how likely the failure will be. It could be automatic, or there could be a saving throw, ability check, or other die roll involved—whatever the DM thinks is reasonable.

Because the companion spell is cast along with the *contingency* spell, the caster's state of being when the *contingency* is triggered doesn't matter, the caster can be bound, gagged, unconscious, or even dead when the spell takes effect.

What is the duration, and area of effect of the 4th-level priest spell *call woodland beings*? Is it okay to use the duration and area of effect from the wizard *monster summoning* spells?

Don't use the statistics for any of the *monster summoning* spells — *call woodland beings* works in a different way.

Unlike the *monster summoning* spells, *call woodland beings* only summons creatures that are within the spell's range. Also unlike the *monster summoning* spells, the summoned creature (or creatures) doesn't appear in some location the caster designates — it travels to the caster's location, which can take quite some time. *Call woodland beings* has no definite duration. The creature remains just long enough to render the caster some service, then it departs. Note that the creature might depart immediately if the caster asks it to fight (see spell description, *Player's Handbook*, Appendix 4, page 274). In any case, the creature called leaves the caster under its own power; it doesn't vanish when the spell ends or when killed as a summoned monster does.

In the *PLAYER'S OPTION™* combat system (from the *Combat & Tactics* book) is failing to turn to meet an enemy attacking from behind the same as turning your back on that enemy? Let's say a character is engaged in fighting a couple of bugbears, and another bugbear comes up from behind and attacks. Does that bugbear get an attack of opportunity if the character doesn't turn around? Would the bugbear get another attack of opportunity the next round if the character still doesn't turn around?

No, failing to turn and meet an opponent is not the same as deliberately turning one's back on an opponent. Creatures are assumed to make some kinds of defensive maneuvers — even against opponents attacking from behind — unless they're completely help-

less. Note, however, that many actions provoke attacks of opportunity. Firing a missile, for example, provokes an attack of opportunity, even when the opponent is standing behind the character firing the missile.

In the *Combat & Tactics* rules, how many attacks of opportunity would a character armed with a long weapon, such as bardiche, which has a melee reach of two, receive if he has chosen the guard action and someone charges him from the front?

None. The guarding character would get his normal melee attack the moment the charging opponent came within reach, but wouldn't get an attack of opportunity unless the opponent did something to provoke it, such as turning its back on the bardiche wielder or leaving the area the bardiche wielder threatens. Just moving around within an area an opponent threatens does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

What's the difference between offensive and defensive disarms in the *Combat & Tactics* rules? Why would anyone choose an offensive disarm when defensive disarms work just as well?

The difference lies in when the disarming attempt is resolved. Offensive disarms are resolved during one of the disarming character's own attack phases. Defensive disarms are resolved when the disarming character's opponent attacks. Offensive disarms have two potential advantages. First, if the character attempting to disarm is entitled to multiple attacks during a round, he can automatically cover a disarmed opponent with the remaining attacks, which should allow him the first strike if his disarmed opponent doesn't surrender. Second, if the character gains the first action during the round and succeeds with an offensive disarm, the opponent will be weaponless when his turn comes to attack. Even if the character who made the disarm doesn't have another attack he can use to cover the disarmed opponent, he might get an attack of opportunity when the opponent tries to retrieve his dropped weapon.



Skip Williams is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc. Questions can be addressed to him at tsrsage@aol.com.

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Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, **DRAGON® Magazine**, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, **DRAGON Magazine**, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).



May Conventions

Conjuration

May 3-5 OK
 Holiday Inn South, Broken Arrow. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Patricia Conner, 1825 E. 16th, Tulsa, OK 74104.

Mage Con North 2

May 3-5 SD
 Best Western Ramkota Inn, Sioux Falls. Guests: Margaret Weis. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, and costume, art, and painting contests. Mage Con North, P.O. Box 84828, Sioux Falls, SD 57118-4828 or e-mail: con@aol.com.

Lehicon 6

May 3-5 PA
 Day's inn Conference Center, Allentown. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: demonstrations, dealers, art and miniatures contests, food drive, and blood drive. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: Lehicon 6, P.O. Box 556, Horsham, PA 19044.

Monadnocon

May 3-5 NH
 Franklin Pierce College, Rindge. Guests: George Takei, Ben Nunn, Jeff Menges, and

Edward Beard Jr. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Brian Hess, 60 Clooee Road, Rindge, NH 03461.

At-Last-a-Con 2

May 4-5 MO
 Knights of Columbus Hall, Ferguson. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a raffle and a painting contest. Registration: \$6 preregistered, \$10 on site. SAGA, P.O. Box 297, St. Ann, MO 63074.

Roc of Ages

May 10-12 NC
 Sheradon Airport Plaza, Charlotte. Guests: James Doohan, Cunnar Hansen, Barbara Leigh, Doug Bradley, and Allan Handelman. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, an auction, films, and an art show. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: GOTH, 105 Honeywood Ct., Kissimmee, FL 34743

Fantasy Fair 6

May 12
 Cresset Exhibition Centre, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers and films. Bruce King, 1 The Hallerds, Eaton Socon, St.

Neots, Cambridgeshire, PE19 3QW, U.K.

Saga

May 17-20
 Mama's Two in Sussex, New Brunswick. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Saga, P.O. Box 695, Sussex, NB, Canada EOE 1P0.

Eclipse '96

May 24-26 MO
 Holiday Inn Convention Center in Columbia. Guests: Tom Dowd, Tony Diterlizzi, Zeb Cook, and Lester Smith. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, dealers, anime, and a murder mystery. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$20 on site. Eclipse '96, 27 N. 10th St., Columbia, MO 65201.

SciFi Dreamin'

May 24-26 PA
 Lycoming College Campus, Williamsport. Guests: Michael O'Hare, Tom Woodruff, Dr. Richard Erikson, Louise Kleba, and Inge Heyer. SciFi Dreamin', 1738 E. Third St. #197, Williamsport, PA 17701, or visit the web site at: <http://www.hway.net/dreamin>.

GameX

May 24-27 CA
 LA Airport Wyndham

- ✱ Australian convention
- ✱ Canadian convention
- ✱ European convention

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Important:

DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

Hotel, Los Angeles. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a flea market, an auction, and dealers. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Write to: Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502.

3 Rivers Game Fest

May 24-27 PA
Pittsburgh Greentree Marriott Hotel, Pittsburgh. Guests: Peter Bromley, Dave Frank, and John Bohrer. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$19.95 preregistered. Andon Unlimited, Three Rivers Game Fest, P.O. Box 1740, Renton, WA 98057

Twin Con '96

May 25-27 MN
Thunderbird Hotel & Convention Center, Bloomington. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA® Network events, dealers, and demos. Write to: Jeff Hammerlund, 107 West Chicago St., Algonquin, IL 60102.

June Conventions

Magnum Opus Con/War

June 13-16 GA
Radisson Hotel, Atlanta. Special guests: Vernon Wells, Charlie Dierkop, and Robert Zubrin. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and computer games. MOC-11, P.O. Box 6585, Athens, GA 30604, or e-mail: moc@ix.netcom.com.

Con Games

June 15-16 FL
Camberly Inn Hotel, Tampa. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, a charity raffle, and tournaments. Registration: \$10/day, \$18/weekend. Con Games, 2 Water Track Radial, Ocala, FL 34472 or e-mail: neconrep@aol.com.

Con Games

June 15-16 FL
Camberly Inn, Tampa. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5. Necronomicon Inc., P.O. Box 2076, Riverview, FL 33569.

Dragon Con 1996

June 20-23 GA
Atlanta Hilton and Towers, Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel, and the Atlanta Civic Center in Atlanta. Guests: Kevin J. Anderson, William Gibson, James O'Barr, R.A. Salvatore, Larry Elmore, and Bruce Sterling. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, films, anime, tournaments, and workshops. Registration: \$50 preregistered. Dragon Con, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362, or e-mail: dragoncon@dragoncon.org, or check out the web site: <http://www.dscga.com/~dragoncon>.

ManaFest

June 21-23 CA
Cathedral Hill Hotel, San Francisco. Events: over 25 different Magic: the Gathering* tournaments and other trading card tournaments. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$30 thereafter. ManaFest, Khalsa Brain Games, P.O. Box 170436, San Francisco, CA 94117, or visit the web site: <http://www.ibar.com/manafest>.

ATCon II

June 27-30 TX
Ramada Inn, Austin. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA tournaments, an auction, and a costume contest. Registration: \$25 on site. G.O.A.T., P.O. Box 3116, Austin, TX, 78764.

Michicon '96

June 28-30 MI
Van Dyke Park Hotel and Conference Center, Warren. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games.

Other activities: dealers and an auction. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$20 on site. Metro Detroit Gamers, P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte, MI 48192 or e-mail: dolphin2@oeonline.com.

PolyCon XIV

June 28-30 CA
California Polytechnic, San Luis Obispo. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$25 on-site. PolyCon Committee, University Union Box 168, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407, or e-mail: polycon@polycon.punk.net.

July Conventions

July 4-7 OH
Greater Columbus Convention Center, Columbus. Special guests: Phil Foglio, Doug Niles, Jeff Grubb, and Kate Novak. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, the Magic: the Gathering* national championship, and an auction. Registration: \$34.95 preregistered. Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 1740, Renton, WA 98507, or e-mail: Andon@aol.com.

Gamefest

July 6 IL
Holy Innocents Church, Chicago. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$5. John Kavain, 857 North Hermitage, Chicago, IL 60622.

Hexacon

July 12-14 AZ
Arizona State University Memorial Union, Tempe. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, tournaments, an auction, a miniatures painting contest, and a computer room. Registration: \$15 preregistered before

7/1/96, \$20 on site. Hexacon 6, P.O. Box 62613, Phoenix, AZ 85082.

Dark Con III

July 19-21 OK
Central Plaza Hotel, Oklahoma City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, computer gaming, and RPGA Network events. Darkmore Inc., 624 SW 24th, Moore, OK 73160.

Quincon XI

July 19-21 IL
The Signature Room in the Franklin Square, Quincy. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA events, demos, and an auction. Registration: \$15/weekend, \$5/day. Quincon XI, P.O. Box 3892, Quincy, IL 62305.

Future Conventions

ATSea '97

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April 5-12

ATSea sails from New Orleans on the Commodore Cruise Line and stops on Playa del Carmen, Cozumel, Grand Cayman, and Montego Bay. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, guest speakers, seminars, a costume party, an auction, and more. Package prices vary. A deposit of \$250 is due by 11/1/96. There is a 20% discount off the deposit amount if it is received before 7/1/96. Contact G.O.A.T. (Gamers of Austin Texas), P.O. Box 3116, Austin, TX 78764.

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Having a convention?
Send us your information!



Network News

by Scott Douglas

By and large, the RPGA® Network supports more conventions than any other organization in the world. Last year the Network sent tournaments to over 200 conventions. We estimate that over 100,000 game fans attended those events.

Why do so many people go? What happens at a convention?

Many have asked the same questions. As a decorated veteran of 171 conventions, let me tell you how I found the answers.

I was a game addict. (Things haven't changed much.) At one point in my gaming career, I decided I wanted to meet some of the people responsible for the creation of the games and novels to which I was hooked. I also thought it might be fun to play with someone out-

side of my regular group, so I started looking in *DRAGON® Magazine's* convention announcements section for a local convention. I found one 90 miles away. It turned out to be science-fiction-related, with just a few games to play. I drove away more than a little disappointed.

But I was persistent; the next convention turned out to be a great event, with all sorts of games and lots of willing DMs. There were gorgeous miniatures events, rare and complex board games, and many role-playing games to choose from. There were seminars on game systems, scenario creation, and game mastering. There was an art show, and an auction with actual art (no prints). There was a con suite—commonly called a hospitality suite—where the soft drinks flowed like rivers, and the nachos never ran low, all for the price of convention admission. It was a great find.

In addition, I made another wonderful discovery: the dealer's room. The dealer's room is a sort of gamer's flea market; lots of new merchandise is available, but the best deals are in the scratch-and-dent/used category. But what I like best about a dealer's room is the range of unusual items some merchants bring to sell: juggling balls, chain mail shirts, sword replicas, nifty jewelry, and cool pewter fantasy sculptures. This is not stuff you can find at the local game store.

Despite my first experience, I have had more fun and made more friends at conventions than I could ever hope to relate. I never regretted that first convention, however, as it taught me a lot about the convention experience.

In order to make first-time convention attendees more familiar with the process, I present but a few of my 297 Rules of Convention Attendance. This I offer as advice to be followed when one is considering attending or actually attending a gaming convention:

Before the Convention

Rule #26: Choose wisely. Announcements appear in many gaming publications. Learn the focus of the convention. Knowing exactly what you're getting into helps you enjoy the weekend. If you have any questions, write the contact.

Rule #49: Start small; think big. It's great to find a con in your home town, but avoid driving more than a couple of hours to your first con. The more time you spend actually attending the convention the better.

At the Convention:

Rule #63: Be comfortable. Convention sites vary. Some conventions are spread out over a wide area, others are compact. Some game rooms are drafty; others are saunas. Be prepared with comfortable clothes and shoes.

Rule #64: Don't overprepare. A knapsack of basic rulebooks, dice, pencils, and paper generally will suffice. One of the marks of a novice con attendee are several milk crates full of game material.

Rule #134: Take breaks. The 24-hour gamers get a glassy-eyed stare that lingers after the convention. They usually enjoy the con on Friday but become more dissatisfied as the weekend progresses, and body functions diminish.

Rule #228: Try something new. You can play your favorite game at home. Provide yourself the opportunity to try something you've been curious about. Visit all the convention areas, and take the time to game with new people.

Rule #297: Enjoy yourself. You have invested some money and a weekend. You deserve to reap the reward — fun. Come to the convention not to win, but to have a good time. Folks who play for enjoyment tend to win more often, anyway.

Scott Douglas, the RPGA Network Coordinator, juggles in his office when he thinks no one is looking.

The RPGA® Network is the world's largest game club, with over 9,500 members around the world. Network members often meet through gaming activities at conventions, and through forming their own clubs either in their communities or on-line.

Network members receive the *POLYHEDRON® Newszine* monthly; the newszine helps keep members informed, with articles both from members and from well-known industry authors. In addition, the Network sanctions member-written tournaments at local conventions and game shops, tournaments in *Call of Cthulhu**, *Shadowrun**, *Star Wars**, the *AD&D®* game, and many other popular game systems.

For more information about any of the Networks programs, write to: RPGA Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or e-mail rpgahq@aol.com.

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I was inspired to write by Christopher Myers' letter on dual classes in Forum in issue #225. What he says rings true and raises a similar complaint about multi-classing and level limits. Only demi-humans suffer from level limits. They are supposed to be there to balance the advantages they get. This would have an effect if they get to that stage, but most campaigns won't last that long. If they do, it doesn't help much. Which player is going to enjoy seeing his character stop dead while humans continue to advance? Until that happens, the demi-human has all the bonuses of his race with no penalty.

Another thing. Why do humans have to dual class, while demi-humans can multi-class? Mr. Myers has shown the shakiness of the dual-class rules. The best thing would be simply to get rid of them. I don't see what overwhelming difference there is about demi-humans that lets only them do two different things from the word go.

My solution is quite simple: let humans multi-class if they wish, and abolish demi-humans' level limits. Demi-

humans' advantages will be roughly canceled out by humans being able to multi-class. If DMs feel they have to compensate human characters, give them each a magical item or an additional point in a stat.

Andrew Pearce
Essex, England

For the past couple of issues, a lot of the letters in the Forum have been about a lack of female gamers. I think then, that my groups are a minority.

Everyone I play with is female. In fact, I only know one male gamer, and he and I never really played together. It isn't that I don't welcome men. To be honest, I would love it if some of them showed up on my doorstep one day and asked to play.

Just thought I'd present the opposite end of the spectrum to you.

Oh, by the way, does any one have any adventure ideas for young gamers (seven and ten years of age)? They're my little sisters, and they were bugging me for the past couple of years to let them play. I was going to wait until they were a little older and more mature, but I finally gave in around Christmas.

They've been having fun so far, but you can only rescue so many baby whats-its from evil wizards before it gets kind of boring. (That's not the only thing we've done, but rescuing babies seem to be their favorite adventure plot.) I would really appreciate adventure ideas.

The 7-year-old plays a water mage, and the 10-year-old is a sorceress of sand and flame in the AL-QADIM® setting. Thanks much.

Jessica Beals
via e-mail

I wished to respond to several letters in the February issue (#227) of *DRAGON Magazine*,

First, in regards to Tim Nutting's problem with overzealous "rules lawyers," sometimes you must decide whether you wish to allow the player to continue to dominate your game. You mention that the other gamers in the group are complaining about his actions and you also mention that you do not wish to hear about ostracizing the individual as he is a friend. My question is, do you place your "friendship," which seems non-existent, above the enjoyment of your other players? Sometimes an ultimatum must be handed down, or you will lose the other players. He must learn that you run the world and the game,

not him. My only other suggestion is that you let him run a game of his own choosing to allow him to use the rules as he desires. Of course, everyone can choose whether to play with him or not.

Second, yet another comment about women in role-playing games. I agree with Eleanor Clarke to a certain degree. I commend her for her rational approach to the problem. However, I would suggest entering all games with the assumption that one will encounter a sexist attitude. It is far too prevalent an occurrence ever to assume that the attitude isn't there. This comment may be seen as extremely cynical, but I have never been in a game where at least one player/character wasn't looking to "chat up the female players/characters" or worse. It is unfortunate, but it's true. I'm not encouraging women to be paranoid, just to know what they are getting into so that they may stop such conduct early. And as an aside to William Valentine, who commented, "It's just us males getting together once a week to talk, brag, and joke with the freedom of not having to watch what we say, or worrying about who may hear us." I have no problem with the guys going out; my husband has interests that I do not share. What do you say during these gatherings that you don't want others to hear?

Andrea McCormick
Harrisburg, PA

I am writing in response to Ceordie Keefe's letter in issue #224. As a DM, I, too, have been faced with the challenge of how to handle introducing new players to a long-running game. No solution is simple, and the judgment of the DM comes into play. Here is what I do:

Brand new and inexperienced players, especially a group of them, are easiest to handle. I just start a new game with them. All PCs are 1st level. This gives them experience in the game and the full enjoyment of developing their characters. Trying to introduce these players to medium- or high-level games tends to scare them away from gaming. Better to take the time with them and teach them the ropes.

Handling experienced players new to a campaign is a bit trickier. First, I familiarize them with the house rules, so they know what to expect. If they have no PC, I work with them to create a character. That PC is started two levels lower than the lowest level PC of the same class in the game. No magical items or

powers are given, and it is up to the player to develop the character from then on. If they already have a character, I first discuss the PC's goals and motives with the player. If necessary, we make any changes, including stripping of items as appropriate to make them conform to house rules. I do not strip capriciously or indiscriminately; I give my players a rationale for any changes. This gives them an immediate goal, for anything I strip I explain to be "misplaced: on the world — somewhere — during their "transition." It also gives them a basic reason to play my game.

Geordie, your treatment by this DM is, in my opinion, appalling, and it angers me. DMs have the responsibility to provide an entertaining game for their players, and they should provide opportunity fairly for all players to contribute to the game. They should listen to the players. They must be flexible. They should provide an environment in which players feel welcome. A DM who does not even do just this is abusing the key element that makes the game work: the players themselves

My advice is two-fold: First, find a game where the DM and players accept you as a gamer, not a sideshow attraction. Second, have your DM friend read this letter. It might give him pause to think about his treatment of new players.

Remember that games are supposed to be fun, and this is a game. If your DM friend ignores or refuses to realize that his treatment of new players is unacceptable, he will lose not only new players (he lost you!), but veteran players as well. He would end up alone.

Anton J. Uselmann
P.O. Box 492
Gold Beach, OR 97444

I am writing in response to the letters of Linda Edwards and Geordie Keefe in issue #224.

Miss Edward wrote about not being allowed to role-play because of an extremely high-level drow and being a girl. Your latter problem shouldn't be an issue; I'd just find another party. As to the former, I also have a mega-character, a hero-status priest. One solution I've worked out with my new DM is to play him like a low- to mid-level character (as appropriate to the campaign) and only use spells like heal/harm as a surprise for the other less powerful players when the entire party is in mortal danger. You could also just take some levels off the character and drop the more

powerful magical items. By the way, a 50th-level character probably should be retired.

Mr. Keefe had the opposite problem, which I've seen numerous times in my five years of role-playing. Starting new characters in a developed campaign can be a problem, but if your DM invited you to play, then he should start you on a par with the other characters at least as far as "net power" goes. This net power could be anything — political, financial, and magical — to make you even with the others.

Dustin Batson
Madrid, Spain

This is in response to Paul Fraser's article, "The Magic Goes Away" (issue #226).

Magic is the basis of most things in fantasy role-playing. Of course your campaign is going to be balanced if your whole world is full of 0-level people, fighters, and thieves, but its also going to be dull. Magic is what makes the AD&D® game fun. It's also why you can't make an exact re-creation of medieval Europe: there was no magic there. How many people would play if your characters couldn't be a wizard or a priest or your fighter couldn't have his plate mail +1 or his sword of sharpness?

The writers of the *Player's Handbook* certainly thought magic was important if they dedicated half the book to spell descriptions. Add that to all the other spells in the books and magazines.

In the unlikely event that mages do unbalance your game, make a monster that is totally immune to magic and let it loose.

Without magic, how do you explain the planes, or the gods themselves? I think Mr. Fraser was just trying to get out of a lot of the responsibility that goes along with DMing. If you like his premise, more power to you. Just don't invite me to your gaming session.

Nick Spear
7421 Windsor Woods, Apt. 2A
Canton, MI 48487

I have played AD&D for over 18 years now. After reading "Forum" in issue #223, a letter from Karrie Huff caught my interest.

Sorry, I'm not of the female gender. Still, I thought Karrie and other female gamers might take interest in my comments. I'd like to address certain points about male-dominated role-playing.

In my campaign, now 12 years along,

I've always found female characters to be as important to the storyline as males, for the basic fact that in every culture, human interaction is a main-frame upon which everything else revolves. I understand your disappointment with most games you've played, with the treatment of females as second-class people or even just "background" extras.

Some of the strongest and most respected personas in my game worlds are women.

Overall, neither male nor female gamers have the edge. A gender mix at any gaming table enhances the role-playing aspect. Still, a skilled DM and an active game group should be able to accommodate any player mix. An ability to do so attests to group integrity, cohesive functioning, and positive play. To alienate others or make them uncomfortable with innuendo that obviously transcends good manners simply defeats the purpose.

Each game session, particularly those of new or mixed groups, provides challenges above and beyond the game itself, in that getting this awkward group to function with teamwork creates fun for everyone.

Problems in a game group should not reflect societal problems: fantasy is escapism, not a psycho-social therapy session.

Nathan Kirschenbaum
Pomona, CA

I must disagree with James Mieritz's criticism (in "D-Mail," issue #226) of Jeffrey Allen Paul's article "The Castle Designer's Guide to Coping With Magic and the Supernatural" in issue #224.

It has always struck me that, in fantasy, we have never really managed to instill in the castle the same level of impregnability and awe that it achieved in Europe during the Middle Ages. We spend days creating fiendish dungeons, traps, and monsters for PCs to face, but then just stick in a basic castle for them to use and abuse. Jeffrey Paul's article provides a perfect redress for this.

I think that James Mieritz mistakes the historical use of castles. Castle walls exist because they are the primary defense once diplomacy fails. His arguments about sending soldiers out would be valid only in very exceptional cases where a walled city needed time to bring in crops or there was favorable

Continued on page 116

Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn

IT TURNS OUT THE "TERRIBLE NOISE" YOU WERE HEARING IS ACTUALLY AN OLD MAN. HE WAS TRYING TO CROSS THE BRIDGE AND LOST HIS BALANCE AND FELL INTO THE MOAT.

HAA!! I FELL FOR THIS TRICK ONCE HELPLESS NPC TYPE JUST SCREAMING OUT FOR A LAWFUL GOOD CHARACTER TO LEND A HAND. NO WAY!! IT'S ALWAYS A TRAP!!

SURE GIVE-AWAY!! OLD MAN INDEED!! WHY NOT PUT A LABEL ON IT, B.A.?

OH COME ON GUYS. YOU CAN'T PLAY YOUR CHARACTER EVERY STEP OF THE WAY ANTICIPATING THE GM'S MOTIVATIONS. ROLE-PLAY!! A REAL PERSON DOESN'T FLIP OUT WITH PARANOIA THINKING EVERY DOOR LEADS TO DEATH!!

HMMNRFF!! YOU HAVEN'T MET MY AUNT TILLY!!



THE OLD MAN REACHES UP TO YOU WITH A PATHETIC LOOK ON HIS FACE, HIS PIERCING BLUE EYES BEGGING. "HELP ME GOOD FRIENDS," HE SAYS IN A VOICE FROTH WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY. "HELP AN OLD MAN AND THE GODS WILL BLESS YOU."



GODS? BLESSINGS? I'M TELLING YOU IT'S A TRAP. HELP THIS GUY AND YOU'RE LIKELY TO END UP WITH YOUR EARS HANGING FROM SOME OGRE LORD'S NECKLACE.

BUT WHAT IF HE **REALLY** IS AN OLD MAN IN DISTRESS?? I DON'T WANT ANY BAD KARMA RUINING MY CHANCES FOR 12TH LEVEL! REMEMBER WHEN I LOST ALL MY HENCHMEN WHEN I SLAPPED THAT BARMAID FOR SHORT CHANGING ME?

BRIAN?

I THINK BOB'S RIGHT. SMELLS LIKE A TRAP.

"HELP ME! PLEASE HELP ME!"



I KNOW! LET'S SEND THE TORCH-BEARER DOWN TO SAVE HIM. IF IT'S A TRAP THEN LIL' KNOBBY-FOOT BITES THE DUST AND WE SAY A FEW NICE WORDS OVER HIS DEAD BODY.

BUT IF HE'S JUST THE NICE OLD MAN HE APPEARS TO BE, THEN WE ALL GET CREDIT FOR AIDING IN HIS RESCUE. MY CHARACTER DANCES THE MANU-WEASEL WITH A MODIFIED JIG!! I RULE!



OKAY, LIL KNOBBY-FOOT CLIMBS DOWN THE BANK OF THE MOAT. AS HE REACHES OUT FOR THE OLD MAN HE SLIPS IN THE WET MUD AND FALLS HEAD FIRST INTO THE MOAT. HE STRUGGLES TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE SUCKING MUD BUT FAILS. NOW BOTH THE TORCH-BEARER AND THE OLD MAN CRY FOR HELP.

STUCK HUH? NOTHING TO DO BUT PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY. I LOAD MY CROSSBOW.

HEY IF IT'S A MERCY KILLING, I WANT IN!

BRIAN DO SOMETHING. KNOBBY-FOOT SAVED YOUR LIFE! HE'S JUST AN NPC SAGA.



AWWWWW, SARA'S RIGHT. LIL KNOBBY FOOT WAS FANNY. HE DOESN'T DESERVE A PAINFUL DEATH FROM ONE OF BOB'S PATHETIC BOLTS. STAND ASIDE BOYS.

I'M GONNA USE A CHARGE FROM MY **RING OF KAVORKIAN** AND SEND BOTH OF THESE POOR SOULS INTO OBLIVION. MY CHARACTER SHEPS A TEAR, MUMBLES A PRAYER AND STUFF LIKE THAT.



YOU GUYS DISGUST ME!! YOU JUST SHUFFED A LOYAL HIRLING AND MURDERED A DEFENSELESS OLD MAN. AND WHAT ALIGNMENT ARE WE?? GEE GUYS, LAWFUL GOOD? LAWFUL NEUTRAL? DON'T THINK YOU'RE GONNA GET AWAY WITH THIS BECAUSE I'M GOING TO DO SOME HEAVY-DUTY ROLLING ON THE DIVINE-INTERVENTION TABLES. **WITH MODIFIERS** I MIGHT ADD.

UH, DO WE GET EXPERIENCE POINTS FOR THE OLD MAN? HOW ABOUT KNOBBY-FOOT?

HEY IT WAS THE MAGE!! HE DID IT!!

BRO MAGE, BAD MAGE!! DO I GET MODIFIERS FOR THAT?

OH BRIAN, I HAD HOPES FOR YOU.



"It's like the man says... 'There's always room for Jello.' "



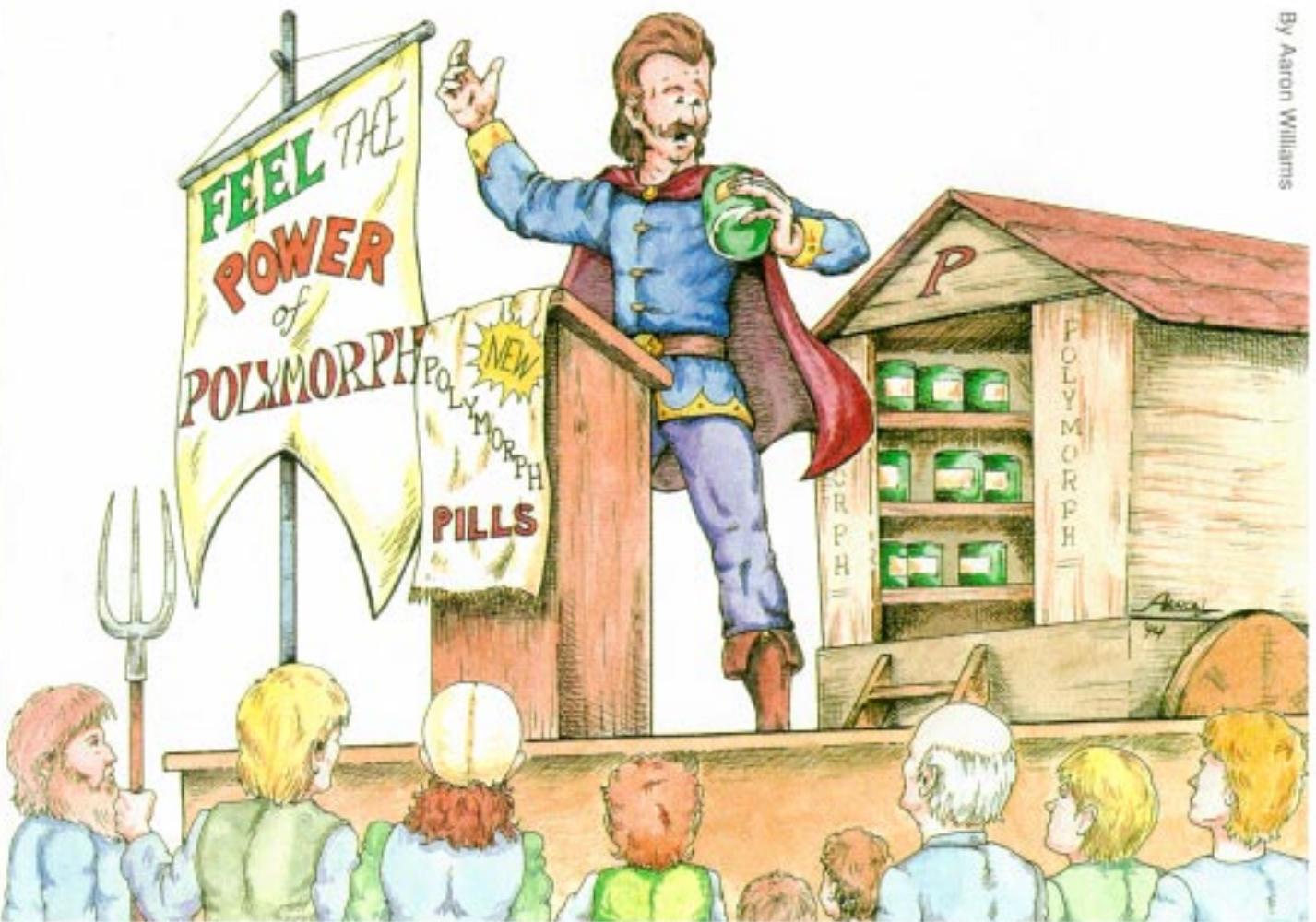
"C'mon, Guys! My intentions toward Snow White were entirely honorable!"



By Mathew Guss



By Aaron Williams



"Yes, friends! Change into whatever you want with these handy pills — er, I mean lozenges — no, wait... they're capsules now..."

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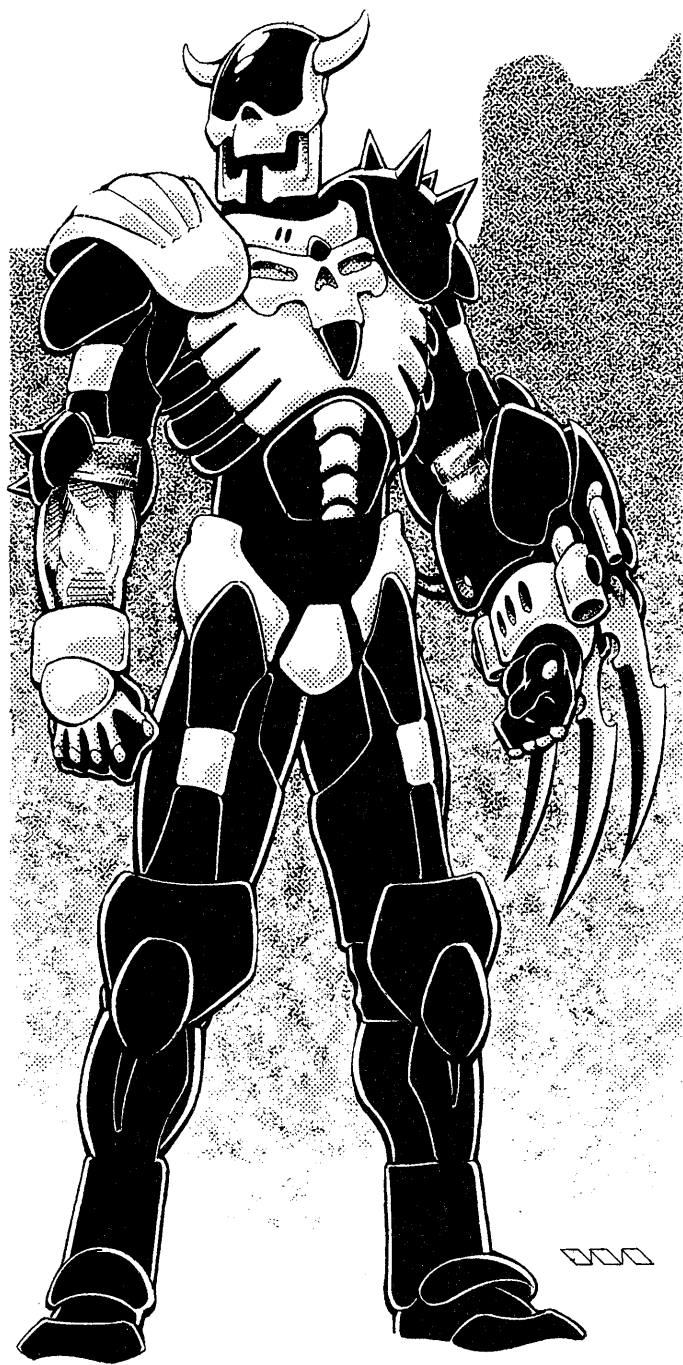
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FLYD

By
Aaron
Williams



TO PREVENT ANOTHER MAGE WAR, AS THE CONFLICT WAS CALLED, IT WAS DECIDED TO FIND A MEANS OF RESTRAINING MAGIC POWER. ALMEHRA PROPOSED MAGICAL BRACERS AS A SOLUTION.

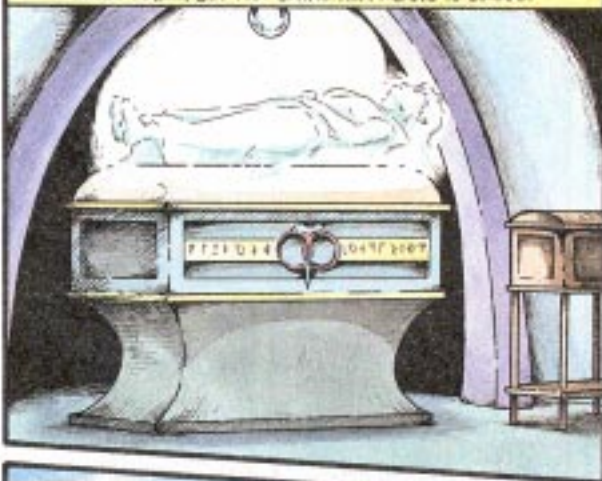


THEY WOULD MENTALLY LINK ALL WEARERS TO EACH OTHER. IF A WIZARD TRIED TO CAST SPELLS OF A POWER SIMILAR TO THOSE USED IN THE WAR, IT WOULD BE SUBCONSCIOUSLY ALLOWED OR DENIED BY ALL BRACER WEARERS. THIS MAGIC DEMOCRACY TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE OF THE SORCERERS' CONSCIOUSNESS, SO DECEIT, POWER PLAYS AND GENERAL UNDERHANDEDNESS COULD CONTINUE.

BUT HER INVENTION WAS LACED WITH TREACHERY. AFTER DONNING THE BRACERS, A SPELLCASTER'S POWERS WOULD CEASE EXPANDING, AND NO SPELL COULD REMOVE THE BANDS, ONCE WORN. ALMEHRA WAS CAUGHT BEFORE ALL THE SORCERERS COULD BE ENSNARED.



HER SPIRIT WAS THEN BOUND TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST PLACES OF MAGICAL LEARNING, AS AN EXAMPLE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS. A SET OF HER ARMBANDS WERE ALSO STORED FOR POSTERITY. IT SEEMS ALMEHRA'S POWERS GREW OVER THE EONS ALLOWING HER TO ROAM THE COLLEGE HALLS, BUT NOT GIVING HER MEANS TO ESCAPE.



IN SPITE OF THE INTENT BEHIND THEIR CREATION, THE MAGICIANS ADOPTED ENCHANTED BRACERS AS THEIR MEANS OF KEEPING ORDER. THE POWER-LIMITING CURSE WAS REMOVED, NATURALLY.



IS THIS BUNCH STILL AROUND?

YES, THEY ARE KNOWN AS THE SUMMRE CED'RN.

SO THAT'S WHO THEY ARE. MELZAK CALLED THEM "ZEALOUS SACKS OF--"

AHEM! YES, I DOUBT THAT MELZAK TOOK UP A PAIR OF BANDS HIMSELF. THE SUMMRE CED'RN OPPOSE ALL RENEGADES, SO IT'S NO WONDER THAT THEY CHAFED.



BUT, WHY DID ALMEHRA MAKE ME WEAR THESE THINGS?

I WOULD ASSUME THAT THOSE, LIKE THE LATER MODELS, LINK THE MINDS OF THOSE WHO WEAR THEM. SHE PROBABLY USED YOUR LINK TO PICK THROUGH THE SUMMRE CED'RN'S COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND FOUND THE SPELLS SHE NEEDED TO BREAK HER CURSE.



SPEAKING OF CURSES, THESE THINGS WILL KEEP ME AN APPRENTICE FOREVER...



WONT THEY?

FLOYD, I.

I MEAN, I CAN BARELY LIGHT A STICK ON FIRE OR LIFT A PEBBLE IN THE AIR!



WHAT GOOD AM I?

SIGH...



I'M NOT EVEN MARRIED AND ALREADY THE MAGIC IS GONE!

FLOYD.



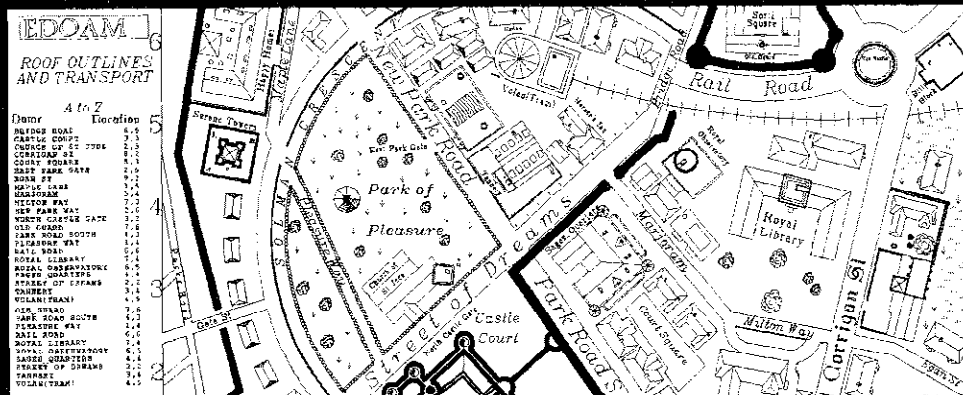


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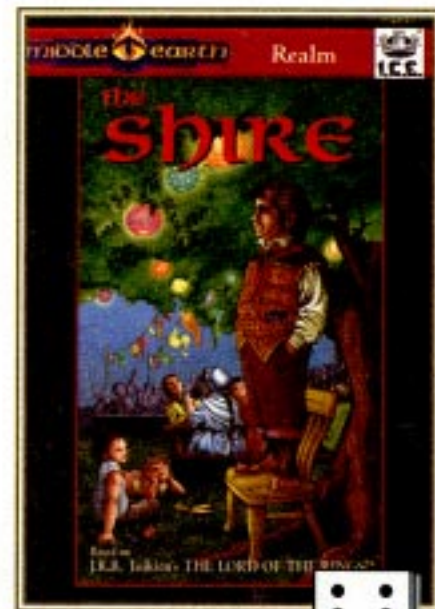
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THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES !

Role-Playing

Reviews

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The Shire

Middle-Earth Role-Playing* game supplement

280-page softcover book, one double-sided 16" x 21" map sheet

Iron Crown Enterprises \$30

Design: Wesley Frank

Development: Jessica Ney-Grimm

Editing: Suzanne Young and Jessica Ney-Grimm

Illustrations: Liz Danforth, Glen Michael Angus, Eric David Anderson, Storn Cook, Edward Johnson, Eric Knowles, April Lee, Stephan Peregrine, and Ellisa Mitchell

Cover: Liz Danforth

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Role-playing games' rating

	Not recommended	
	May be useful	
	Fair	
	Good	
	Excellent	
	<i>The BEST!</i>	

I hate to travel. An agoraphobic and proud of it, I never leave the house without kicking and screaming, and I go on vacations only at gun point. The way I see it, why hassle with flight schedules and hotel reservations when a role-playing game can take you anywhere you want to go? Sure, an airplane can get you to Monte Carlo. But it can't get you to Middle-earth.

Angmar

Middle-Earth Role-Playing* game supplement

160-page softcover book, one double-sided 16" x 21" map sheet

Iron Crown Enterprises \$25

Design: Graham Staplehurst and Heike Kubasch, with Jessica Ney and Peter Fenlon

Development: Jessica Ney and Peter Fenlon

Editing: Suzanne Young, Jessica Ney, and Peter Fenlon

Illustrations: Glen Michael Angus, Rick Britton, Liz Danforth, James A. Fallin, Pete Fenlon, and Arnie Swekel

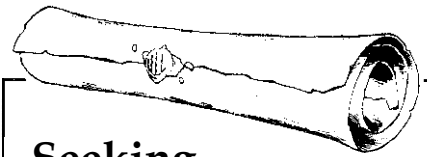
Cover: Angus McBride

Iron Crown has spent more than a decade mining gold from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. They've cranked out board games, poster maps, miniature figures, everything but Hobbit-flavored ice cream. Ironically, Middle-Earth Role-Playing (MERP), the centerpiece of the Iron Crown line, is one of their more troubling efforts. Though MERP boasts a solid system, it never quite nails the fairy tale ambiance of the novels and tends to emphasize the wrong elements. Combat and magic, for example, play much larger roles in the game than in the books. Still, despite my reservations about MERP, I'm crazy about the sourcebooks, noteworthy for their stunning attention to detail. When Tolkien fans die and go to heaven, they'll likely find themselves in a library stuffed with MERP books. *The Shire* and *Angmar*, two volumes in the "Realms of Middle-earth" series documenting specific locales in the Tolkien universe, typify what Iron Crown does best.

The Shire, the lighter of the two, features the land of the Hobbits. *Angmar*, the darker one, describes the eerie realm of the Witch-king. The books follow the same format, more or less, with long chapters devoted to culture, history, politics, personalities, and landmarks. Tolkien aficionados will probably feel more at home with *The Shire*, arguably the most memorable locale in the novels. Designer Wesley Frank provides vivid depictions of Hobbiton, Sackville, and other Hobbit hideaways, along with in-depth profiles of Bilbo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee, and Gandalf the Grey. The brainy treatise on Hobbit magic includes a generous list of magical items unique to Middle-earth, such as the vantage stick and Lestine's pipe of creature comforts. A five-page timeline brings newcomers up to date, a chapter-long glossary explains the difference between "mathom" (a gift with sentimental value but no practical use) and "muck" (sheep droppings). *Angmar* covers less-familiar territory, requiring the designers to fill in a lot of blanks; while casual players won't find that a problem, Middle-earth scholars might take issue with some of the second guesses. Though not as character-focused as *The Shire* — and hence a bit drier — *Angmar* impresses with its analysis of military affairs (Agmaran fortifications, siege equipment, and chains of command) and imaginative essays (herb lore, orcish nomenclature, and castle design).

Both books are well-organized and tightly edited, and contain a surplus of informative, clutter-free maps. Neither has an index, however, reducing their value as references; if you want to find Bilbo's biography, you'll have to recruit a search party. The writing is generally strong, more so in *Angmar*. *The Shire*, though comprehensible, is stilted in spots ("Hobbits possess a subtler panache than most legendary beings"), as if Frank were trying too hard to impress his English teacher.

But it's the content that's important here, not the execution. Frank so skillfully evokes the pastoral landscapes of the Shire that you can almost smell the daisies. He takes us on a whirlwind tour of Bywater, the Bridge of Stonebows, and Hardbottle, spinning enchanting tales of the fairy spirits of Brocken Borings and how the Hobbit Bandobras invented the game of golf. He gives us a taste of the Hobbits' pastries (made with maple drippings and fresh plums) and opens their dresser drawers (proper gentlehobbits prefer linen bedding to straw). If Bilbo fractures his leg, he can mend the bone with an arfandas flower poultice; if he burns his lip on a hot pastry,



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he can ease the pain by nibbling on a klaven berry.

Angmar is an equally riveting place. Designers Graham Staplehurst and Heike Kubasch conjure a world of barren plains, gray skies, and random

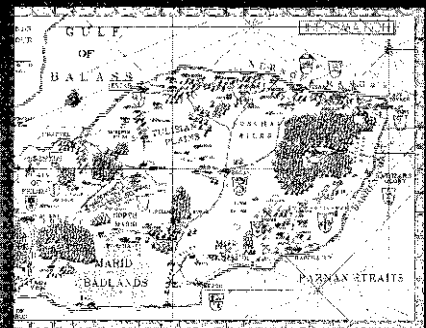
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death. Here, a description of the slave-city of Litash: "The remains of some [of the slaves] could still be seen, skeletons wrapped in wind-dried skin like parchment, nailed with barbed spikes to the clay walls of their dwellings." Trolls infest the hills, dwelling in garbage-strewn lairs riddled with lice and fleas. Minions of the Witch-king protect their fortresses with pit traps coated with jegga, a pasty black poison made from bat venom.

If the books share a flaw, it's that they tend to emphasize the whimsical a bit too much. The blissfully serene Shire seems more like a place you'd go for a vacation than a place you'd go for a fight. Angmar oozes gloom but doesn't seem particularly menacing. Angmar bad guys spend too much time fortifying their strongholds and not enough stirring up trouble. The trolls don't seem to be up to much other than wallowing in garbage. We're told of a mighty dragon called the Worm, "greedy, devious, and selfish." Sounds promising. But what kind of greedy, devious, and selfish stuff does the Worm do?

A more troubling drawback for **Angmar** is the absence of adventure hooks. That's a drawback hard to over-

look considering the formidable task facing a referee attempting to put together campaign from all these bits and pieces. (Let's see... I'll use the Cult of the Dark Lord from Chapter Five, add the Storugoruz Orc-hold from Chapter Eight, and maybe throw in a few trolls from Chapter Three.) By comparison, **The Shire** serves up 30 pages of adventures; though none are earth-shattering, they're complete, they're playable, and — best of all — they're there.

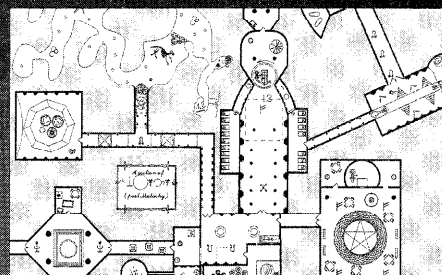
Evaluation: **The Shire** and **Angmar** are first-rate sourcebooks, meticulously researched and staggeringly complete. Iron Crown did just about everything right, even sequestering most of the statistics in the appendices to make the books accessible to those who've never heard of MERP. If I could have only one of the two, I'd take **The Shire**; **Angmar** loses a pip for skimping on adventure ideas. Still, both volumes are worth a look from anyone drawn to the concepts in *Lord of the Rings*. And if you're a fan of the AD&D® game — which, like just about every fantasy game that's ever wriggled its way out of a word processor, owes a heavy debt to Professor Tolkien — that means you.

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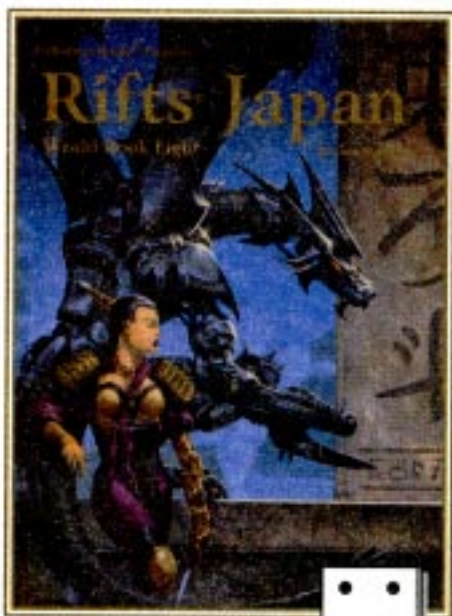
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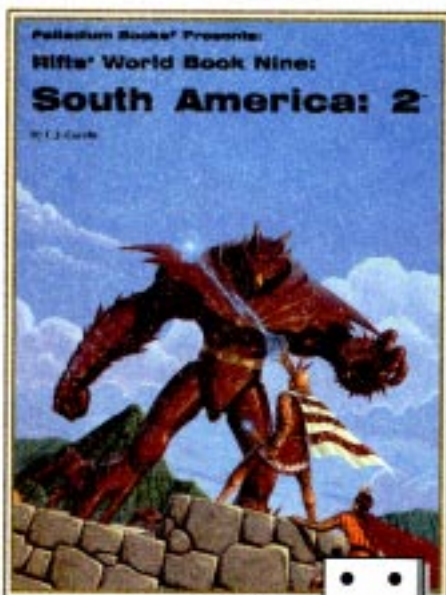
\$20

Design: Kevin Siembieda with Patrick Nowak and C.J. Carella

Editing: Alex Marciniszyn with James A. Osten, Kevin Kirsten, and Julius Rosenstein

Illustrations: Vince Martin, Wayne Breaux, Randy Post, and Kevin Siembieda

Cover: John Zeleznik



RIFTS South America: 2

RIFTS* game supplement

192-page softcover book

Palladium Books

\$20

Design: Carlos J. Martijena-Carella



with Kevin Siembieda

Editing: Kevin Siembieda with Alex Marciniszyn, James A. Osten, Kevin Kirsten, and Julius Rosenstein

Illustrations: Vince Martin, Wayne Breaux, R.K. Post, and Kevin Siembieda

Cover: Kevin Long

I live in Des Moines, Iowa. If I were writing about it, I'd tell you about the insurance companies, the skywalks, and the minor league baseball team. When Palladium gets around to publishing RIFTS Des Moines, they'll probably tell you about the death bomb factories, the vampire militia, and the corpse recycling centers. If you've read any of the previous RIFTS world books, such as *RIFTS Africa* or *RIFTS England*, you know that Palladium, to put it mildly, takes a somewhat eccentric approach to geography.

Japan and **South America: 2** continue the tradition. Of the pair, **Japan** is the more conventional — conventional, that is, in the sense that Elvis sightings are more conventional than UFO abductions. **Japan** imagines a futuristic society where warmongering scientists are at odds with spirit-worshipping mystics. The book emphasizes robotic monstrosities (Ninjabots, Fire Tiger Light Infantry Support Vehicles, Underwater Crab Walkers) and high-tech gizmos (Neural Disrupter Arrowheads, Particle Beam Pistols, Exploding Shuriken). Designer Kevin Siembieda promises to tackle oriental magic and mythology in another 200-plus page supplement. That'll bring the page count for **Japan** close to 500. Yikes!

South America: 2 builds on the concepts introduced in *Riffts World Book 6: South America*, but it works just fine all by itself. Like **Japan**, **SA: 2** features a bizarre blend of ancient history (the Inca civilization) and science-fiction craziness (the Arkhons, alien invaders who pilot mile-long space ships). C.J. Carella also throws in some psionic mummies, a race of telekinetic giants, and a band of transdimensional mercenaries called the Megaversal Legion. For the trigger-happy, Carella devotes about 60 pages to Tri-Beam Energy Rifles and Backpack Mortar Systems. That's more weaponry than I want, certainly more than a part-time RIFTS player like me will ever get around to using. But the RIFTS fanatics in my circle of acquaintances love nothing better than blowing stuff to smithereens; **SA: 2** should have them weeping with joy.

Both books are well-written, with

even the most arcane topics clearly explained. There are no indexes, but the Quick Find Tables make it a breeze to locate key topics. The maps, however, are perfunctory at best, good for pin-pointing the relative locations of large land masses but not much else. **Japan's** full-page Ley Lines map, for example, contains exactly 15 words of text — and that's counting the title.

Though fundamentally sound, the setting descriptions in **Japan** could've used more development. Siembieda has a flair for capturing the sweep of history and the nuances of culture. But his attention seems to drift when he gets down to the details of daily life. Take, for instance, his handling of Kyoto, the capital city of the New Empire. We're told how the ravages of civil war were reduced by the formation of an eight-man council, each member given the power to veto any proposal he felt wasn't in the nation's best interests. We're told how the anti-technology doctrine of the New Empire served to preserve agrarian traditions. We're told about the Robotics Corporation of Ichto [*sic*], the imperialistic schemes of the Ototmo [*sic*] Shogunate, and the spiritual significance of the Millennium Trees. But it's a tale told mostly at a distance; we're shown plenty of panoramic views but not many close-ups. A diary of a typical citizen's routine, the floor plan of an average residence, and a street map or two would've made **Japan** easier for first-timers to get their bearings.

The diligent, however, will find plenty to keep them busy. Though **Japan** has no adventures — a common frustration in RIFTS books — Siembieda has loaded the text with enticing concepts, bursting with possibility. The H-Brand Corporation maintains a private army of cyber-samurai and ninja crazies, poised to exterminate their competitors. Incidents of industrial sabotage and assassination are so common, they barely merit a mention in the daily news. To satisfy their insatiable lust for power, close to 80% of the citizens have submitted to some form of cybernetic enhancement, risking mutilation and insanity from illicit procedures. It's a tense, exciting setting, ripe for exploitation.

SA:2 has many of the same strengths and weaknesses of **Japan**. On the plus side, Carella makes the pulse race with his chilling descriptions of the City of the Dead, the Imperial Capital of Cuzco, and other creepy locations. On the minus side, he tends to favor generalities over

specifics, making the descriptions of dubious value to all but the most determined explorers. Another negative: no adventures. Another positive: a fascinating magic system, based on line drawings. Yet another: fantastic adversaries, like the Pucara Mind Mage and the Blood Weeper. And yet another: terrific player characters (anyone for blood lizard PCs?).

Evaluation: Both *Japan* and *South America:2* team with rules and statistics, making them tough sledding for everyone but RIFTS veterans. If you're a neophyte, you'll likely discover that reading a RIFTS book is like walking into the middle of a movie — make that a movie with Sanskrit subtitles. Palladium could probably expand their customer base if they took a tip from Iron Crown and confined more of the rules to the back of the books (or included some kind of universal conversion tables to make it easier to translate RIFTS into other game systems). But if you're sold on the RIFTS system and you're comfortable designing your own adventures, you'll get a kick out of these. *Japan* is more accessible; *South America: 2* is nuttier.

Editing: Sam Shirley
Illustrations: Arnie Swekel
Cover: Stephen King



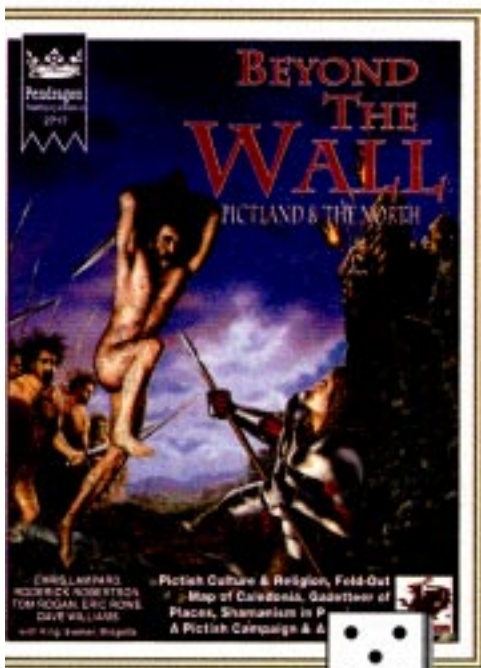
GURPS Greece

GURPS* game supplement
128-page softcover book
Steve Jackson Games \$18
Design: Jon F. Zeigler
Editing: Susan Pinsonneault
Illustrations: Jean Martin and
Shea Ryan
Cover: Jeff Koke

So you want to design your own fantasy setting, just like the pros, but you don't know where to begin? Nothing to it. All you have to do is choose a real-life historical era, transcribe some relevant passages from an encyclopedia (changing the occasional sentence to avoid a plagiarism suit), throw in a few fairies, and — presto! Instant setting. Odds are, of course, it'll be about as fun to read as the tax code, but don't feel bad. The majority of pro-produced settings are awful, too.

So what distinguishes the superstars from the snooze-fests? Let's learn some lessons, courtesy of **GURPS Greece** and **Beyond the Wall**.

1. Begin with an interesting era. The eras most suitable for fantasy gaming are rich with legend and rife with conflict. Stable governments and staid populations make for dreary settings, which is why the number of sourcebooks about feudal Japan outnumber those covering contemporary Canada. **GURPS Greece**, focusing on the Heroic Age of 1600-1150 B.C. and the Classical Age from 800-323 B.C., couldn't have a stronger foundation; Achilles, Medusa, the Trojan War — what more could you want? Similarly, **Beyond the Wall** draws on one of the most volatile periods of European history, the rise of the savage Picts in northern Britain. With their militant outlook and barbaric traditions, the Picts make perfect foils for the courtly knights of Pendragon. (Incidentally, if you're unfamiliar with Pendragon, you'd do well to check it out. A brilliant recreation of the days of King Arthur, its one of the few RPGs that qualifies as a work of art.)



Beyond the Wall: Pictland & the North

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2. Follow a sensible format. Both **Greece** and **Wall** include the expected material — historical backgrounds, mythologies, key personalities — but present it in different ways. Greece employs the multi-tiered format pioneered in previous GURPS sourcebooks, such as *GURPS Vikings* and *GURPS Middle Ages I*. This format gives equal weight to history and legend, serving it up in a smorgasbord; referees can choose what they like and ignore what they don't. Thus, an adventure can be as accurate as a textbook (employing the Realistic style, one of several options detailed in the campaign chapter) or as outrageous or as a B-movie (the Mythic style, where the gods take an active role). Alternately, the referee can opt for a hybrid of reality and fantasy (the Fantastic style, where magic exists but doesn't predominate). In contrast, **Wall** offers only one campaign option, closest in spirit to Greece's Fantastic style. Spells are real, gods tinker in human affairs, wizards are as common as they are in AD&D.

How do the formats stack up? Greece offers more choices, but the lack of focus means more work for the referee, while **Wall** is easier to use but locks the referee into a single style. Further, with its liberal references to Caledonian politics and the Celtic Christian church, **Wall** presumes familiarity with the Pictish era; if you slept through history class, you may find much of this baffling. **Greece**, on the other hand, is a great teacher, even those for who think ancient Greece is something you scrub off a frying pan.

3. Don't regurgitate. Uh... let me put that more delicately: don't parrot the stuff you got from the library. Large chunks of **Greece** — an account of the Peloponnesian War, the merits of an ogliarchic government, the cultural life of the Hellenic society — read like notes for a term paper. It's interesting, but hey, I know how to use an encyclopedia, too, and could probably have found most of this myself. Designer Jon Zeiger does better with the supernatural than with the history, mixing well-chosen excerpts of Greek mythology with adroit role-playing tips. He explains how to portray Olympian gods (as entities of limited omnipotence with an obsessive interest in human affairs), points out the best skills for a Courtesan player character (Sex Appeal, Carousing, and Fast-Talk), and suggests offbeat rewards for victorious warriors (arrows dipped in the blood of the Lernaean Hydra). He also tells

how to stage an Athenian trial and provides remarkably complete information about triremes, penteconters, and other war ships. But once you launch your ships, however, you won't find many places to explore. The overviews of Athens and Sparta are too general to be of much use in a campaign.

Like **Greece**, **Wall** also falls short in the locale department. Though Chapter Six lists dozens of locations, none of them receive more than a paragraph of description. The entry for Achavanich reads: "A group of sixty standing stones that form a truncated oval open to the south-east. Beside the most northerly stone is a stone cyst." That's essentially it. Curious about the stone cyst? Too bad.

The illuminating peeks at Pict culture make up for the absence of fully-developed locales. We learn how the Picts construct circular dwellings of peat and wood called wheelhouses, how adolescents celebrate maturity with a spiritual journey to the Otherworld, and how they forge bonds with the Samhladh, ghostly guardians who take the form of reindeer, salmon, and blackbirds. Adults mark themselves with ornate tattoos that indicate status and serve as links to the Samhladh. Time, represented by the Mythic Spiral, is considered cyclical rather than linear, where the past, present, and future exist simultaneously. It's a smart, compelling take on an age rarely visited by game designers.

4. Give us something to do. In other words, give us some adventures, or at least give us some guidelines and a few springboards. **Greece** comes up short. There are no complete scenarios. The skeletal campaign outlines aren't likely to inspire many memorable adventures. I guess we'll have to wait for *GURPS Greece II*. **Beyond the Wall**, though, is a referee's dream. It includes a chapter crammed with campaign tips, three excellent introductory adventures, and a full-length adventure titled "The Treacherous Pict" that not only brings the sourcebook material to life, but stands as one of the best Pendragon scenarios to date.

Evaluation: Neither **Greece** nor **Wall**, alas, translate easily into other systems. AD&D gamers may find **Greece** a bit more palatable, as a good half of the book is relatively statistic-free; unfortunately, it's the least interesting half (the historical summaries). **Wall** relies so heavily on the Pendragon rules that, short of a rewrite, I don't see how it

could accommodate a different game. That said, **GURPS Greece** and **Beyond the Wall** stand as solid examples of history-based role-playing, must-haves for serious fans of GURPS and Pendragon. And if you want to learn the basics of setting design, you'd be hard-pressed to find better blueprints. Class dismissed.

Short and sweet

Ham World, by N. Robin Crossby, Tom Dalglish, and Edwin King with Brad Carter, Brian Clemens, Rob Duff, Mike Dwyer, John Frazer, Doug Gillanders, John Greer, Stephen Hinchcliffe, David Kowan, Sharon MacLeod, Simon Matthews, Brad Murray, Gene Siegel, and Garry Steinhilber. Columbia Games, \$25.

Speaking of great settings, here's a golden oldie that's been keeping fantasy fans entranced — and impoverished — since 1982. A generic environment adaptable to any RPG, **Harn World** has spawned dozens of supplements and mountains of commentary, making it a hobby unto itself. This revised entry-level package consists of a 72-page *Introductory Book*, an 80-page *Master Index*, and a gorgeous full-color poster map, sheathed in a plastic binder. The *Introductory Book* consists of three long essays devoted to Kethira (the Earth-like planet otherwise known as Harn World), the island of Harn (a barbaric land with a handful of civilized settlements), and the continent of Lythia (Kethira's largest land mass, home to a diverse range of cultures and races). The *Master Index* lists every major locale, tribe, and oddity in Kethira, complemented by evocative illustrations and elegant maps. **Harn World** emphasizes culture and economics at the expense of magic and monsters, making it less appealing to hack-'n'-slashers than to veterans who take their games seriously. Unwieldy? Perhaps. To call **Harn World** ambitious is like calling the Grand Canyon a large hole. But if you've outgrown dungeon crawls, you might be ready to jump in.

Information: Columbia Games, Box 3457, Blaine, WA 98231.

Player's Secrets of Roesone, by Rich Baker. **Player's Secrets of Endier**, by Colin McComb. **Player's Secrets of Medoere**, by Bill Slavicek. **Player's Secrets of Tuornen**, by Dave Gross. **Player's Secrets of Ilien**, by Kevin Melka. **Player's Secrets of Talinie**, by Allen Varney. **Player's Secrets of Ariya**, by Allen Varney. TSR, Inc., \$7 each.

You say you like the **BIRTHRIGHT™** setting for AD&D, but you don't know which of the domain sourcebooks to buy? That's no surprise. They look alike, they follow the same format, and truth to tell, they share more similarities than differences. So I spent a day pouring over the first seven, including the two that were touched on in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #224, and here's my report. **Roesone** has a nice rural feel, clear goals, and an engaging environment for warriors. **Endier**, one of the smaller domains, emphasizes politics, diplomacy, and trade; it's challenging but manageable. With hostile neighbors and a shaky economy, the unstable theocracy of **Medoere** looks like a tough government to control over the long haul. **Tuornen** seems shell-shocked from civil strife; I liked the knights, but the administrative squabbles gave me a headache. Swashbuckling pirates, mysterious cults, and the Isle of Ghosts make the theocratic **Ariya** an irresistible setting for magic-minded rulers. Despite its wizards and prosperous farms, there's nothing much out of the ordinary in **Ilien**, another small domain. Ecologically inclined players might go for **Talinie**, with its surplus of natural resources and deforestation problems. The best for beginners: **Roesone**, **Endier**, and **Ariya**. You're welcome.

Planes of Conflict, by Dale Donovan, Colin McComb, and Monte Cook. TSR, Inc., \$30.

This lavish **PLANESCAPE™** setting package completes the trilogy that began with the *Planes of Chaos* and *Planes of Law* boxes. And it's a doozy. I was impressed by the graphics (again by DiTerlizzi, perhaps TSR's finest illustrator), the posters (six in all, including maps of the City of the Star and the yugoloth Wasting Tower), and the adventures (four nail-biting extravaganzas). But what really floored me were the number of ways to knock off PCs. If the Labyrinth of Fiery Doom or the World Ash of Yggdrasil doesn't get 'em, the darkstrike aceserpent or the carnivorous vaath the probably will. Who'd have thought the neutral planes would turn out to be so dangerous?

Living Legends, by Diane Piron-Gelman, Chris Hartford, and Bryan Nystul. FASA Corporation, \$10.

A team of Explorer Corps PCs attempts to sabotage a Clan Smoke Jaguar Warship and escape in one piece in this action-packed adventure for the

Mechwarrior* game. Stunstick-toting guards complicate the team's efforts, as do a flock of alien dinosaurs that combine the nastiest characteristics of pterodactyls and velociraptors. It's good, goofy fun, well-paced and easy to run. But there's a catch. Before he gets started, the referee is advised to investigate the following Battletech* game products: *BattleTech Compendium Rules of Warfare*, *BattleTech Map Set 4*, *Technical Readout 3050*, *Technical Readout 3055*, and the *MechWarrior Companion*. That's a lot of homework.

Wizards and Rogues of the Realms, by William W. Conners. TSR, Inc., \$15.

If your AD&D campaign could use some new characters, welcome to central casting. This handy supplement provides statistics, descriptions, and role-playing notes for wizards and rogues from every corner of the **FORGOTTEN REALMS®** setting. Thus, we have the rugged Dalelands wizards, the war mages of Cormyr, the crafty Sembian merchant wizards, and we're just to page 27. Some new spells would've been nice. So would've a set of pregenerated characters. But with such a gen-

erous number of archetypes — we're talking close to three dozen character kits — only a sourpuss would complain.

Illuminati: New World Order* game Blank Cards. Steve Jackson Games, \$2.

Tastefully understated, this set includes striking illustrations of an Arctic snowstorm, the Invisible Man, and the bank account of a card collector.



Rick Swan has designed and edited more than 50 role-playing products, including the The Complete Wizard's Handbook, The Complete Ranger's Handbook, The Complete Paladin's Handbook, and The Complete Barbarian's Handbook for TSR, Inc. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50370; enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you'd like a reply.

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has lapsed. But the licensor, Capcom, continues work on its Werewolf* computer game. (Contact: WWolfMail@aol.com)

Notes from the field

After last month's split between Hero Games and its longtime publisher, Iron Crown Enterprises, Hero has found a new home for its Champions* and Hero System* game lines. A new publisher, Gold Rush Games (Elk Grove, CA), already licensed to produce Hero adventures, will now produce sourcebooks and genre books too. (Contact: goldrushg@aol.com; herogames@aol.com)

Steve Jackson Games (Austin, TX) planned to collect all the new GURPS* game rules introduced in festoons of supplements and release them as a 192-page update. It turns out that 192 pages isn't enough, so *GURPS Compendium I: Character Creation* (192 pages, \$21.95) will appear in June, with a second volume (combat, role-playing, and campaigns) scheduled for November. There's still no planned release date for

the In Nomine* game, and don't even ask about the Hot Lead* game.... (Contact: sjgames@io.com)

One more game designer breaks into fiction: Phil Masters (*Kingdom of Champions*, *GURPS Arabian Nights*) got a story idea while researching the recently published *GURPS Places of Mystery*, which he co-authored with Allison Brooks. Masters has just sold the resulting story to the prestigious British science fiction magazine *Interzone*.

Arrrgh

Two errors from issue #225: The first Castle Falkenstein* game-based novel, *From Prussia With Love*, is by John DeChance, not George Alec Effinger. Robin D. Laws was credited as the designer of the Barsaive boxed set for FASA's Earthdawn* RPG; Laws actually wrote the Parlainth boxed set for that game.

Correcting and updating issue #227's story on White Wolfs layoffs: WW president Stephan Wieck says fewer than 15 employees were laid off, and "manage-

ment absolutely did not spend several days after the announcement deciding which employees would be let go. [...] within a couple hours after the meeting, everyone who was being let go was notified. The entire process was handled in one day. To suggest that Jennifer Hartshorn or anyone else was singled out during the layoffs is totally inaccurate, and such false reports imply malice on the part of myself and White Wolfs management that is entirely contrary to the sorrow we felt concerning the layoffs." WW's financial position has improved considerably after record-breaking sales months in January and February.



Allen Varney has written 15 roleplaying supplements, including the Binsada, Ariya, and Talinie domain sourcebooks for the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign setting. Send news to tsrmags@aol.com.

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Forum

continued from page 98

terrain for battle. Otherwise, scarce manpower was just being wasted on needless sorties. All fortifications — including castles, forts, towers, and fortified cities — relied upon their strong walls to protect defenders and tie up besiegers.

Castles allow a small force much greater power and should not be wasted. Indeed, fortifications were often used offensively in this way by siting them so that a small force protected by strong walls was placed to control enemy territory (trade routes, crossings, pastures, etc.).

The point is that castles, however employed, were ultimately defensive spaces. Jeffrey Paul's article reflects this perfectly for a fantasy setting.

Tim Eccles.
Middlesex, England

In "Sage Advice" in issue #226, Skip Williams says "Chaotic psionicists have never been allowed on Athas (or anywhere else for that matter...) at least not us player characters.... The chaotic psionicists

from The Will and the Way are anomalies; exactly how they managed to become psionicists and retain their chaotic alignments is unrevealed." (Emphasis mine)

If one is to construct a believable fantasy world, there must be an internal logic to support the structure. You cannot have the rules one way for one class (player characters) and one for another (non-player characters).

In the 20 years I have been playing the D&D® and AD&D games, I have noticed plenty of example of restrictions on player characters that are not applied to non-player characters. The above example is only the most recent. In a fantasy setting, what logic there is cannot be overstressed.

The only solid rule of fantasy is consistency. If the rule applies to one, it applies to all.

Gary Stahl
Dearborn, MI



A note from the editor:

We get many letters that we'd like to print here in Forum.

Unfortunately, many writers fail to provide an address on the letter, and some even fail to sign the letter. Remember that we will not print letters sent anonymously or without an address; however, we will not print your address unless you ask us to. If you hope your comments may lead to correspondence with others, please remember to tell us it is all right to print your full address. We won't print e-mail addresses, either.

Note that we will not publish personal attacks against authors, other letter writers, fictional characters, other companies, game worlds, or the editors' pets.

It is also important that letters be typed or neatly written. There are letters that have come in that we think might have been brilliant epistolary exercises... but we just couldn't read them. Typing your letter increases the chance that we will read it and use it in Forum.

Thank you.

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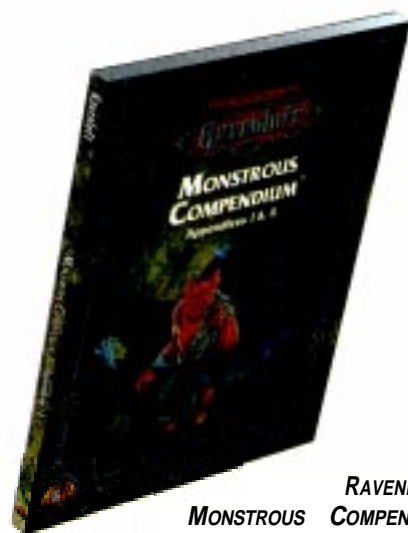
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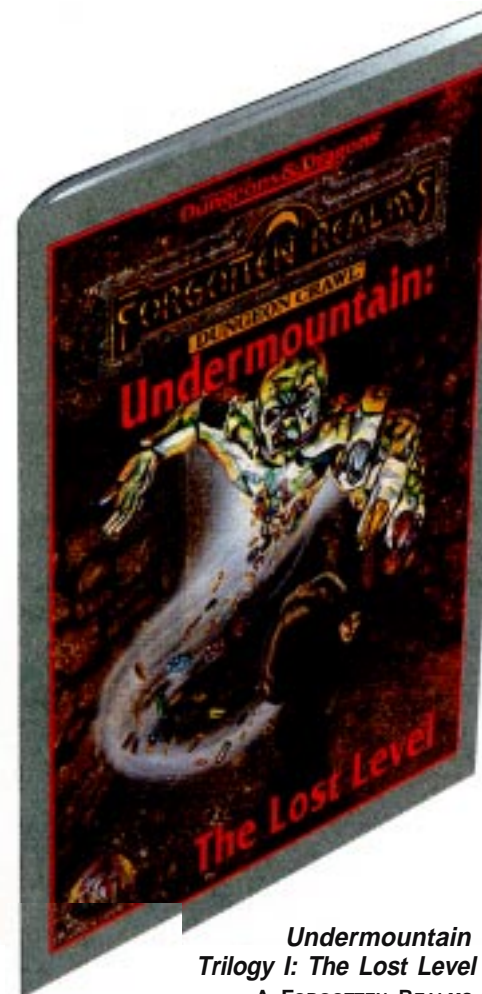
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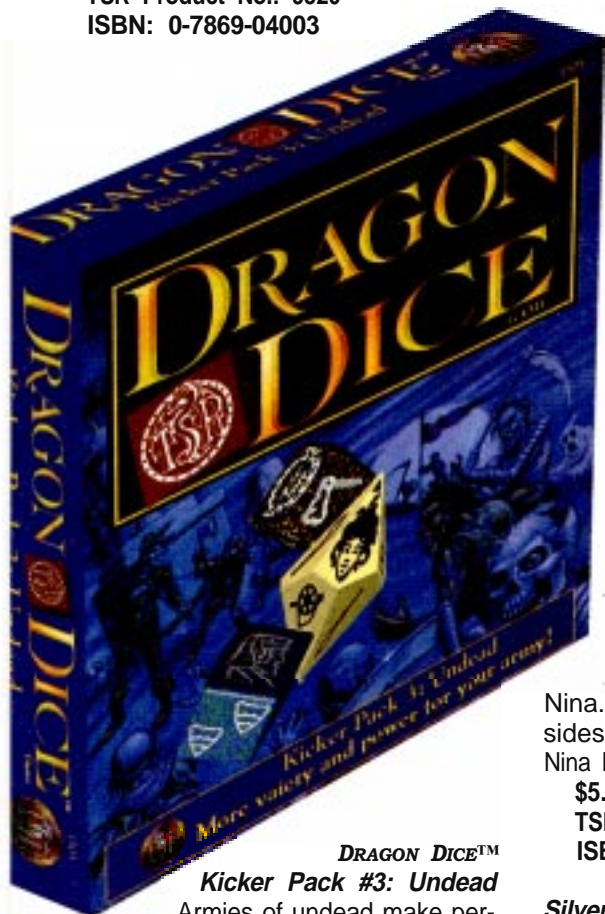
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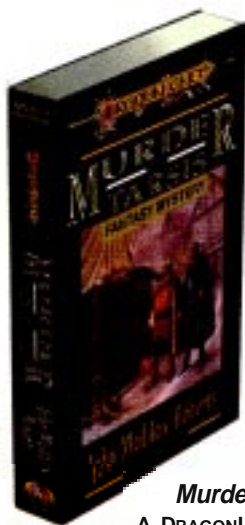
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Interplay AD&D® computer game division

Interplay Productions (Irvine, CA), which acquired the AD&D **FORGOTTEN REALMS®** and **PLANESCAPE™** computer game licenses from TSR last year, has announced its first product in the line. A real-time strategy game set in the **Realms**, **BLOOD & MAGIC™**, designed by Vas Nokhoudian and developed by Tachyon Studios, is scheduled for release this summer in both PC and Macintosh versions.

Two later games are being designed in-house for release by year's end. *Descent to Undermountain* uses the engine from Interplay's bestselling *Descent* game. The **DRAGON DICE™** computer game is based on TSR's tabletop dice game, and Interplay will handle customer support and rules questions for both computer and table versions. (World Wide Web: www.interplay.com)

Ars Magica*/Everway* sold

Three months after cancelling its role-playing game lines, Wizards of the Coast (Seattle, WA) announced the disposition of two lines. The *Ars Magica* game has gone to Atlas Games (Roseville, MN), publisher of the *Over the Edge** RPG and *On the Edge** trading card game. Pagan Publishing (Seattle), producer of licensed *Call of Cthulhu** game supplements and *The Unspeakable Oath* magazine, will take WotC's *Everway* game.

Atlas

John Nephew started Atlas Games in 1990 to publish *Ars Magica* game supplements licensed by the game's original publisher, Lion Rampant, where he once worked. Nephew says the ArM acquisition is "personally thrilling" and "very positive for our bottom line." The acquisition "underlines our credibility as a game publisher in for the long haul."

Nephew plans to "take a pretty firm guiding hand" in the (re)development of *Ars Magica*'s fourth edition, aiming for a cleaner and tighter style, a return to the second edition's "literate and literary approach," removal of the third edition's *True Reason*, and reduction of the past emphasis on diabolism. Nephew is arranging extensive playtesting and hopes to release the new edition by year's end.

WotC had planned an ambitious format for the fourth edition — four full-color volumes in a slipcase — but Atlas, a small company of seven employees, plans a more traditional format, which makes reprinting of short runs practical. Support plans remain sketchy, but Nephew believes a "fairly modest" quarterly release schedule of substantial sourcebooks best serves the devoted ArM audience. This game is blessed with a base of fans who are astoundingly literate and reasonable," he says; he intends to rely on their feedback, especially via the Internet.

(Contact: atlasgames@aol.com.)

Pagan:

Pagan Publishing's John Tynes, who worked at WotC as a role-playing editor and Dominia Continuity Coordinator (1994-95), says, "I enjoyed the [Everway] game a lot when I worked at WotC." Heretofore essentially a basement operation of four employees, Pagan is contracting with two freelancers to maintain the *Everway* game line. Tynes expects to finance the new hires through sales of the game's *Spherewalkers* supplementary cards, printed and ready to ship since December. Pagan paid nothing for the cards and game line.

Pagan first intends to complete WotC's projected support products, such as the *Spherewalkers Sourcebook*. Thereafter, Pagan plans two types of *Everway* game support: scenarios and sourcebooks aimed at the core gaming audi-

ence, and a line of free-standing "peculiar" worldbooks on offbeat fantasy subjects, intended for a broader audience.

Tynes continues to wear two hats — he also edits the *Feng Shui** role-playing game line for Daedalus Entertainment in Seattle. (Contact: paganpub@aol.com)

Vampire TV show

Press deadlines last issue prevented timely announcement of the new Fox network TV series based on the *Vampire: The Masquerade** RPG published by White Wolf Game Studio (Atlanta). Titled *The Kindred*, the series began with a two-hour movie on April 2 and is continuing on Wednesday nights at 9 P.M. (EST), after the popular show *Beverly Hills 90210*. Both shows are produced by legendary hitmaker Aaron Spelling.

The Kindred focuses on the endless intrigues of five of the game's vampire Clans (Brujah, Gangrel, Nosferatu, Toreador, Ventruue) in San Francisco. Vampire game designer Mark Rein-Hagen served as a consultant and wrote one of the eight episodes.

In other vampiric news, White Wolf shipped the *Vampire: The Dark Ages** game in February, ahead of schedule, to excellent response. Set in the Middle Ages, *V:DA* is the first of five historical games, to be published annually, based on WW's five modern-day *Storyteller* games. Other periods planned include the *Wild West* (for the *Werewolf** game), the *Age of Exploration* (*Mage** game), and periods still undecided for the *Wraith** and *Changeling** games. Each game includes appendices allowing play of the other *Storyteller* games in that era, and each will have its own support line.

White Wolf's license for its fine introductory RPG, the *Street Fighter** game,

Continued on page 116

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